

# Crisis Of Ambedkarites And Future Challenges

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At the outset let me thank the organizers for doing me this honour by inviting me to deliver the third Ambedkar memorial lecture on this auspicious day and on a theme which besides being foremost in the minds of people who are saddened to see the state of the Ambedkarite dalit movement is of vital importance to the revolutionary future of this country too. I have been variously speaking on the issues connected with this theme in discrete manner, interestingly much of it in the format of Ambedkar memorial lectures all over the country over the last two decades, but never before have I faced a challenge of speaking comprehensively and exclusively on the crises faced by the Ambedkarites. The challenge becomes acuter as it alludes to the crisis of Ambedkarism itself, which by its very mention rouses sentiments of people. I am pretty sure of it, through experience. Essentially the challenge for me is to be objective and still not be critical, direct and still not be accusative, precise and still not be hurting. I will try my best to meet this challenge. But should I appear failing, it may kindly be attributed to my overriding anxiety to see the movement of Dalits, whom I have been calling organic proletariat of this land, come on track the soonest.

I intend to break the topic into four logical parts. In the first, I would take stock of various types of Ambedkarites in vogue to underscore the point that this identity is reduced to its antithetical essence and has only contributed to confounding the existing confusion among masses. The second part would try to enumerate various crises faced by the Ambedkarites. I will try to list out possible causes of these crises in the third part. In the fourth and final part, we can discuss the challenges faced by Ambedkarites in a way to overcome the identified causes.

Let us then begin with who the Ambedkarites are.

### **Who are the Ambedkarites?**

Ambedkarites and Ambedkarism have become a part of the popular dalit discourse and like many other popular terms do not have precise meaning. Even their usage in academics is mostly imprecise. Few people tried defining them with questionable success but even their output has been largely inconsequential to their popular usage. The usual retort from their users, when challenged, is that even other such terms, such as Gandhite and Lohiaite also do not have definition. Why then should one insist upon the definition of Ambedkarites? The innocuous sounding arguments embed volumes of behavioral data on the Ambedkarite Dalits. Dalits who could be expected to be suspicious of what exists in the larger society, hegemonized by the Hindu religion and culture; strangely appear to emulate everything of it, albeit with a claim of difference. If one asked why the Ambedkarites have to sing lengthy gathas in Pali, observe meaningless religious rituals and continue with the old customs, the retort comes that Hindus also do it. Indeed, if one looked at their behavior critically, one would find that their entire cultural life is patterned on what the Hindus did. While consciously they criticize Hindus, unconsciously they keep following them in each and everything. Even the current pseudo intellectual trends like dalit capitalism, dalit bourgeoisie, etc. can also be seen as mere aping the models in larger society. The shortest rejoinder one could offer to the protagonist of such behaviours is that you cannot simply afford to emulate your adversaries; you pave the way for your certain defeat once you accept playing the game of the enemy on his terms. I am using this term 'enemy' in spatial sense and not in a communitarian sense. This, I hope, should settle any possible argument connected with the matter.

Lets us take stock of all Ambedkarites in vogue in various fields.

### **Politics**

Soon after getting disillusioned with the caste Hindus in the Mahad struggles in 1927, Babasaheb Ambedkar gave up his efforts towards bringing about social reforms in the Hindu society and had turned towards newly emerging opportunities in politics. He had formed two political parties, viz., the Independent Labour Party in 1936 and later in response to the increasing communal stances in politics, the Scheduled Caste Federation (SCF) in 1942. At the fag end of his life, he conceived a different political formation to bring together all the non-communist progressive forces under a single banner styled as the Republican Party of India (RPI). Unfortunately he did not live longer to see it formed. In deference to his wishes, his followers dissolved the SCF and formed the RPI, which however failed to capture the idea of Babasaheb Ambedkar and became merely a new label to the old SCF. RPI, at the time of its foundation had wisely decided to have collective leadership through a presidium, because it realized there was no leader who could command confidence of all as did Ambedkar. But even this experiment could not last long and the RPI split. BC Kamble, one of the members of the presidium and an advocate by profession in Mumbai contended that Ambedkarism was only constitutionalism and only educated people like him could understand it. He denigrated the then senior leader Dadasaheb Gaikwad, calling him dhotarya (one who wore dhoti, the village attire) and accused him of enamoring the communists. RPI went on splitting thereafter, on the issue of what Ambedkarism was. Some young leaders early on saw no future for themselves in the RPI and went on to join the Congress purely for greener pastures, but not giving up their label 'Ambedkarite'. Later, when the RPI under the leadership of Dadasaheb Gaikwad carried out a nationwide land satyagraha, the Congress was alarmed by the prowess of this radical expression of Dalits and consciously launched its cooptation strategy to contain it. One of the first to succumb to it was none other than Dadasaheb Gaikwad himself, who despite being conscious of this could not thwart it. He was made a Rajya Sabha member. The execution of this cooptation strategy was accomplished by the then chief minister of Maharashtra, Yashwantrao Chavan.

By the late 1960s, when the entire world was in turmoil with various peoples' movements, the Dalit youth in Mumbai, while reacting to the increasing incidence of caste atrocities, formed the Dalit Panthers, emulating the Black Panthers in the US. They tried to transcend caste and embrace all the socially oppressed and economically exploited people into 'Dalits' and spoke a militant language of transforming society. The sheer paradigm change it represented threatened the establishment and stunned the world. Before it could do anything significant, it split. One Raja Dhale raised an issue of Ambedkarism, accusing others of leaning towards Marxism, which he contended, Babasaheb Ambedkar opposed. His Ambedkarism was Buddhism. Dalit Panthers splintered and practically disappeared but sprouted soon in the form of the Bharatiya Dalit Panthers, with the likes of the late Arun Kamble and Ramdas Athwale leading it. Around the early 1980s, when the nostalgia of dalit masses for Babasaheb Ambedkar had reached its high point, Prakash Ambedkar, his grandson, appeared on the scene. He received good reception from Dalits on the basis of which he waged some good struggles based on economic issues concerning Dalits and other poor. Sharad Pawar, alarmed by the reemergence of the radical looking dalit movement, followed in the footsteps of his mentor, Yashwantrao Chavan, who had successfully placated Gaikwad earlier, and picked up Ramdas Athwale to neutralize Prakash Ambedkar. He would thereafter play many games, the unity game being the infamous of all, through his stooge, Athwale, and completely decimate the dalit movement in Maharashtra.

The political movement of Dalits in Maharashtra today is reduced to numerous factions of RPI, Prakash Ambedkar's Bharip Bahujan Mahasangh, some factions of Dalit Panthers, and innumerable billboard organizations, which become active on the eve of elections to claim their share of political rent from the ruling classes. Needless to state, all of them swear by Ambedkarism and call themselves Ambedkarites. Their splintering from each other alludes to differences, not necessarily ideological, nonetheless they are

inconsequential to this identity. One faction could ally with Congress, other with BJP, and still other with someone else, but they would all be Ambedkarites. The story is more or less same even for other states. The idea of Dalit Panthers inspired youth in many states to form their own Panthers. Gujarat, the neighboring state, saw a vibrant Panthers movement but it also was steamed out. In Karnataka, Dalit Sangharsh Samiti lived longer, carrying out many inspiring campaigns but could not survive the forces of internal fission and outside enticement. By far in the political arena, the only exception has been the Bahujan Samaj Party created by the late Kanshiram.

Kanshiram began it with Bamcef in Maharashtra, around the same time as the birth of the Dalit Panthers, mobilizing government employees belonging to Dalits, Adivasis, BC/OBCs and other religious minorities. For this forlorn lot, socially distanced from their own community but not accepted by others, Bamcef operated like a club, very apolitical and unthreatening. It maintained activity pace with periodical meetings, seminar and conferences at various levels and charged fees like any other club. It was 'giving back to the society', much lesser than five percent that the Ambedkar's dictum demanded, in return for the job they got with community identity. Kanshiram, graduated to non-parliamentary politics by creating DS4, the Dalit Shoshit Samaj Sangharsh Samiti and soon thereafter to formation of a political party for parliamentary politics. As Kanshiram averred, he had learnt how not to do politics from the RPI, he kept a unitary control of the BSP in his and his close confidant, Mayawati's hands. There were no leaders of consequence in BSP to be wooed for larger gains by the ruling class parties. If anybody left the party for whatever reason, he would be soon reduced to a non-entity. The inherent danger of split was thus thwarted in this totalitarian design of the party structure itself. BSP, with a unique advantage of Dalit demography and history of erstwhile RPI-struggle clicked in Uttar Pradesh and emerged as a veritable political force. Although, it never projected itself overtly as the Ambedkarite party, its backbone was constituted by Dalits who

saw it as one. Imperatively BSP had to maintain its dalit core by installing scores of Ambedkar statues, naming roads, colonies and institutions; creating Ambedkar parks and memorials, etc., for boosting the ego of Dalits.

Thus, the political arena is fraught with numerous factions, each one claiming following of some Dalit segment to the ruling class parties to extract political rent. BSP has styled itself differently, becoming the ruling class party itself. There are many Dalits who jumped off the RPI bandwagon and joined the ruling class parties obviously for their own enrichment, but they continue to be Ambedkarites. Many of them still swear by Ambedkarism with their convoluted arguments. As one Marathi dalit poet perceptively challenged these self seeking leaders, “vagalun bhimachya nava, tumhi pudhari hovun dawa” (exclude the name of Ambedkar, and show us how you become a leader), they know that without demonstrating allegiance to Ambedkar they cannot exist. Dalits belonging to a majority caste within the scheduled caste caste-cluster, irrespective of their party affiliation, excepting perhaps the communist parties, claim the identity of Ambedkarite, as though by natural rights.

### **Social Organizations**

Although political outfits have greater visibility because of their relative resource richness, there are numerous organizations afield that call themselves Ambedkarite. As described, the offshoots of the original Bamcef exist in factions and they carry on with the same worn out model but without undiminished zeal. They have in fact grown, if one goes by the geographical expanse of their conferences. For the last few years, at least one faction of them has been holding conferences abroad. They persist with the ideology of Kanshiram encapsulated in the formula ‘85 versus 15 percent’ and dream that one day they will vanquish the Brahmanical forces. The entire thrust is to reclaim the past cultural glory of the bahunas, which they accused Brahmans of having taken away by overpowering them with deceit. Many of the Bamcef factions have adopted a racist identity -

Mulniwasi (the original inhabitant) for themselves. Ambedkar had rejected the racist theory behind varna or caste differentiation. However, that does not affect their claim to be Ambedkarite. These factions do not operate yet in mainstream political arena but have political ambition of overturning the tables on Brahmans. Their current phase, which has continued from at least early 1970s, is supposed to be the awakening phase. Once the Mulniwasis awaken to the fact that they have to regain their lost kingdom, they would come on to roads to wage the concluding battle and fell the fortress of Brahmins.

There are many Buddhist organizations, initially confined to Maharashtra but slowly spreading across the country, which are supposedly working for realizing Ambedkar's dream of making India a Buddhist country, which also claim 'Ambedkarite' as their rightful identity. On the eve of his conversion to Buddhism, Ambedkar had formed Bharatiya Bouddha Mahasabha (BBM) (Buddhist Society of India) to manage the integrity of the neo-Buddhist community, which would come into being after his conversion and carry on the conversion work further. After his demise, his son Yashavantrao alias Bhaiyasaheb Ambedkar had become the president of this organization, which is headed currently by his widow, Meeratai Ambedkar, who had become its president after the death of her husband. BBM also suffered multiple splits and it is virtually difficult to know how many of them exist. Almost every town and city has multiple BBMs but without any connection with the central one. Besides, there are other Buddhist organizations with different labels. All of them however are Ambedkarites.

There is another organization, which was formed by Babasaheb Ambedkar—Samata Sainik Dal (SSD). During the Mahad satyagraha, people had organized a voluntary corps, Samaj Samata Dal to look after the security of the Mahad conference, which was transformed later into the SSD. The SSD was a formidable force to keep away mischievous elements from the dalit movement. After 1956, since one section of opinion literally upheld Ambedkar's dictum that there was

no need for Dalits to have agitational methods and they should focus on constitutional methods, SSD suffered erosion in importance and had almost disappeared. It was revived by many people many times and it exists as the poor version of its original self. There exist multiple SSDs, all claiming legacy of the old SSD. All of them of course are Ambedkarites.

Then there are numerous community organizations, (youth organizations, Mahila mandals, etc.) spread across the slums, hamlets and villages with varied names, which have set up Buddha viharas, erected statues, at places opened up libraries and boarding houses for students. To the extent most of them are tenuously connected with some or the other leader, they are also afflicted with factionalism. All of them however are Ambedkarites.

### **Employees' Organizations**

Thanks to reservations, Dalits constitute sizable proportion of the employment in the public domain (government-central, state, local self; PSUs, financial institutions and banks). While for some time these employees had been a part of the mainstream trade unions and officers' associations, they progressively experienced that their issues did not fit in the latter and rather at times conflicted with their core interests. Therefore they began forming their own associations. Since there could not be caste based trade unions or associations, they took the form of 'welfare associations' in each organization. Some of them joined together and created larger entities over expanded domain, industry, state or country. Ostensibly they are meant to take care of the interests of their own members in service matters. However, they tend to extend themselves to community in the spirit of the Ambedkarite dictum of 'paying back to the society'. They are typically found in the increasing congregations of Ambedkarite Dalits at many places such as Chaitya Bhoomi in Mumbai, Diksha Bhoomi in Nagpur, Koregaon Park near Pune, Mhow near Indore, Kranti Sthal at Mahad, etc. and on many dates associated with Babasaheb Ambedkar. They do 'social service' in distributing food packets to



people, open an eye check up camp and distribute free spectacles to the needy, open free clinics to check up and distribute commonplace medicines. All these Associations, needless to say claim to be Ambedkarites.

## **Academics**

With the role model of Babasaheb Ambedkar and his mantra 'educate, agitate and organize', there has been a good deal of progress among Dalits in education, although it still lags behind that of others. In higher education, there is a very high incidence of Dalits in Humanities courses. It still hovers around 70 percent and majority of them take up teaching profession and become 'academic'. This class has been active in contributing to the knowledge in the spheres of sociology and politics leveraging their subjective experiences. While much of it may be ignored as stereotype, catering to academic rituals and requirements, a few of them did interrogate the mainstream in significant terms. Undoubtedly, they bore huge potential compared to what they could actually accomplish. Lately, perhaps to create a framework for their contribution, a strategic move is evident in launching Ambedkar Chairs, Ambedkar Centers, or outfits with some such names in every university and colleges. These outfits are poorly provided and are invariably manned by Dalits. They offer regular courses in Ambedkar thought and other social issues and carry out research in those topics and have thus sped up their reproduction. As such the academic energy of the entire higher educated Dalits is sought to be bound within the newly created framework. There has been sudden spurt in so called research activities and consequently Ph D in the issues related to Babasaheb Ambedkar, with inevitable fall in quality. However, they do promote variety and feed into already existing tendency among Dalits to splinter. There is an urgent need to examine the wisdom behind such a move apart from fomenting identitarian outlook of Dalits in academics. With infinite quibbling on issues among these academics, one thing however remains constant, which is their identity as Ambedkarite.

## **Literary and cultural organizations**

With the spread of education, Dalits began expressing themselves and created their own literature, 'Dalit Literature'. It shook up the literary establishment monopolized by the upper castes until then and in course secured it recognition and certain amount of respectability. It is not that there is any organized movement of these litterateurs which coordinates their output or lends direction to their efforts. This is perhaps accomplished through what are known as sahitya sammelans (literary conferences). These sammelans have really proliferated in the states like Maharashtra, the birth place of dalit literature. Insofar as the literature is a mirror of the society, the dalit literature could not escape marks of degeneration of the dalit movement, which usually manifested into excessive subjectivism of the individual litterateurs. It is a kind of reflection of this sad state that they are found to squander their energy in the sterile debate whether their literature should be called dalit, or Ambedkarite, or Phule-Ambedkarite or Buddhist or something else. Besides literature, there are groups which work for cultural awakening of Dalits through the medium of songs, music, street plays and dramas, also without much coordination amongst them. Not having anything objective to relate with, they all revolve around identity and 'Ambedkarite' lends them solace.

## **Professional Organizations**

Although the overall enrolment of Dalits in higher education has been far less than the national average of 12 percent, in the vicinity of just 8 percent, much of it being in humanities courses as said before, over the years there has been a sizable number of Dalits in professions, such as engineering, technology, medicine, etc. who have also formed their professional associations. They too operate as clubs but quite like employees' associations, they also extend to do community service, of course with the Ambedkarite identity.

## **Dalit Diaspora**

A sizable number of Dalits are settled/working abroad in many parts of the world and constitute dalit diaspora. They too slowly organized themselves around the Ambedkarite identity and have been working on various causes, such as preparing opinion abroad so as to exert pressure on the Indian government to take care of the dalit interests. Some of these organizations did contribute in this direction in significant measure but over the years they also got afflicted by the same splintering disease as in India. They are invariably active in celebrating the birth anniversaries of Babasaheb Ambedkar and act as social network, wearing Ambedkarite identity.

### **Virtual Networks**

There are numerous e-mail groups, blogs and social networks like facebook, twitter, and so on with which Dalit youths have formed their virtual networks which also reflect deep concern for the community issues. They are inherently amorphous groups, which assume form through their devotion to Babasaheb Ambedkar. They are all declaredly Ambedkarites.

### **NGOs**

From the mid-1980s, NGOs have acquired special space in the global governance structure. Since the state was mandated by the Washington Consensus, which directed this global capitalist campaign, to withdraw itself from economic activities, to discard its welfarist garbs, and to package services it traditionally provided for marketization, NGOs were conceived to alleviate the pain caused by these developments in various segments of populations. Dalits have been obviously a prominent social group which was to be most adversely affected and many NGOs were needed to work among them. As a result there has been huge proliferation of NGOs, so much so that they have eclipsed the entire dalit movement giving rise to a phrase “NGOization of the dalit movement”. NGOs work on specific issues with a professional outlook and are usually manned by the youngsters appearing to do social work, they appeal to masses

more than the dalit leaders who are given to empty rhetoric. NGOs effectively disorient Dalits from seeing their woes as systemic and offer them piecemeal solutions. Most such NGOs also swear by Ambedkarism and identify themselves as Ambedkarite.

### **Activists and Intellectuals**

Besides the above, there are many individuals who may not be affiliated with any of the above organizations but imagine themselves to be 'active' in social matters. By virtue of their intellectual standing, they enjoy some amount of recognition and are generally seen in the seminars, conferences, conventions and conclaves. They are invariably individualistic but claim to be Ambedkarite.

### **Common masses**

Besides the above identifiable groups, the common folks of Dalits also claim the identity of Ambedkarite.

The objective look at this bewildering picture certainly tells us a few things: that despite wearing the same identity of Ambedkarite, there is no coherence even within any groups not to speak of across groups; that many of them could constitute opposite ends of an ideological spectrum, that very few among them may be aware of Ambedkar's work beyond superficial levels; that they are ostensibly concerned with their narrow and short term interests and do not even have an idea of what ails the community. It certainly tells us, perhaps contrary to commonplace perception, that Ambedkarite identity is not as much rooted in any philosophy or ideology of Babasaheb Ambedkar as it is with his caste identity. The practical definition of 'Ambedkarite' is a person who is born in the caste which has hegemony over the social space of Dalits in a province/state. For example, All Mahars in Maharashtra, all Malas in Andhra, Holayats in Karnataka, Pariahs in Tamilnadu, Chamars/Jatavs in UP, Vankars in Gujarat and so on are automatically Ambedkarites, irrespective of what they do. Very few Dalits belonging to other castes than these

would admit that they are Ambedkarite. Sadly and shockingly, Ambedkarite thus becomes a euphemism for the caste-name, much narrower than even the term 'Dalit'

### **Crises faced by the Ambedkarites**

Every Ambedkarite listed above, whether he is conscious of it or not, experience some kind of crisis. These crises can be enumerated as below:

#### **1. Crisis of Identity**

Identity should serve the purpose of distinguishing one either as an individual or some aggregate of individuals from their counterparts in larger society. But when all kinds of people, seemingly located in dissimilar camps, claim the same identity, it naturally entails identity crisis. In what way, a politician with the BJP that professes right wing Hindutva ideology or Shiv Sena which follows parochial politics identifying people on the basis of their language, religion, region and even sub castes is to be identified with a landless Dalit struggling to eke out his living in a field of an OBC farmer, or a BSP politician who professes 85 percent versus 15 percent calculus and seeks to combine them (OBC farmer and a dalit farm labourer) together, overlooking material contradictions between them? Obviously, there is little common between a dalit bureaucrat and his dalit maid servant or his people whom he has left behind in village. Ambedkarite identity fails to serve as a viable identity to various interest groups as listed above.

While the Ambedkarite identity is flaunted by Dalits within themselves, many of them tend to hide it at the interface with others. Since Ambedkarite identity is synonymous with low caste untouchable, many upwardly mobile Dalits have changed their caste indicative surnames and adopted upper caste names. They would not have Ambedkar's picture in drawing room, lest others should identify their caste. Many of them even go further to adopt the language,

behavior, culture, and to observe traditions and rituals merely to hide their caste identity. To a large extent these schizophrenic behaviors of the upwardly mobile Dalits also have created disconnect between them and the common dalit masses. This behavior of the upwardly mobile Dalits rather refutes the representational logic that has been the core of the dalit movement. The higher educated Dalit individuals, occupying positions of power or prosperity do not necessarily represent concerns of the dalit community. This was sadly experienced by even Babasaheb Ambedkar in his own life time.

## **2. Crisis of ideology**

It may be argued that Ambedkarite is not a simple identity but an ideological identity. It creates bigger problematic than associated with even the simple identity because it raises a question what the Ambedkarite ideology is. If Ambedkarite ideology is annihilation of castes, there are number of Ambedkarites who proclaim to the contrary and still claim to be Ambedkarites. They even go so far as to deny that Ambedkar never advocated annihilation of castes. They argue that castes can never be annihilated and hence they should be strengthened. The shrewd among them use Marxian dialectical dictum to support their casteist outlook. They would say that by strengthening castes, the caste contradiction would be ripened, leading to a caste war which eventually would resolve or transpose the contradiction in favour of dalits. VT Rajshekhar of the Dalit Voice generally represents this ideological strand. Mulnivasis, who claim racial distinction of Dalits (and perhaps also Adivasis) and some others as original inhabitants of India, want to reverse the Hindu social order to make all others as secondary citizens, also are Ambedkarites, notwithstanding they directly contradict Ambedkar's dictum that Indian castes do not have racial basis and also his ideology expressed in terms of his aim to create a society based on Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. Babasaheb Ambedkar, way back in 1938 had told Dalits that they had two enemies: Brahmanism and capitalism. But a section of upwardly mobile Dalits eulogize dalit capitalism and celebrate coming of the dalit bourgeoisie. Ambedkar

warned Dalits that his Brahmanism should not be identified with people belonging to Brahman caste and that Brahmanism could well be found among Dalits. Ambedkarites' outlook generally failed to make this subtle distinction and have only targeted Brahmins by caste. There cannot be any doubt that Ambedkar wanted social morality in governance so as to take care of the weak. His Buddhism was to provide the requisite moral armament for the society. Dalits scarcely reflect concern for social morality. For instance, there is hardly any difference between the Ambedkarite Dalits and others in the matters of corruption or any other amoral acts. It is an indisputable fact that Babasaheb Ambedkar was a socialist, albeit of a Fabian variety. His States and Minority provides a glimpse of his vision to hardcode socialistic structure of society into the Constitution of India. But surprisingly majority of Dalit intellectuals, calling themselves Ambedkarites lent their support to the social Darwinist policies of globalization just to be on the right side of the government. Ambedkar's ideology may well be seen in pragmatism, which does not see any inexorable principle in the flow of history but deals with it as things unfold. As against that, the Ambedkarites appear to be living in past, which paradoxically has been cruel to them. The entire Ambedkarite discourse appears past oriented, oblivious of the contemporary forces that impeach upon them. Had it been rooted in present, it would have noted the structural changes befallen the society, warranting discarding of their anti-Brahman rhetoric and identitarian obsession. Indeed, the ideological paradoxes are simply too many to enumerate.

### **3. Crisis of Leadership**

With such a crisscross fragmentation of Dalits and apparent ideological incoherence, the Dalits face an acute leadership crisis. In some degree all these crises are mutually reinforcing. Each social group has numerous factions, with their respective leadership. The model of leadership in the Ambedkarite dalit movement unfortunately is rooted in the cultural paradigm of feudalism, quite like any other, which primarily installs a leader and solidifies around

him. It does not have organic growth through the people, who are agitated over an issue come together and create their leadership. This model necessitates maintenance of distance between a leader and his followers, which entails resources, which are not easy to come from within Dalits. Therefore most dalit leaderships seek sponsorship of the resource rich non-Dalit sources. Naturally, such leaders would be obligated to their donors and do their bidding whenever they want. Of course, it is not to say that all the leaders rise through the same process; rather they certainly do not to start with. But at some stage of their development, they do face this dilemma and inevitably succumb to the demand of survival, gradually getting deflected from the very purpose they had begun with. It induces self-seeking tendency among leaders which sets in a vicious cycle of their degeneration. Today this self-seeking tribe of leaders has become the greatest hurdle in any attempt to extricate Dalits from the current morass.

#### **4. Crisis of Politics**

Politics has caught up with Dalits in a big way because it is seen as the means to secure state power. The Ambedkar's dictum that political power holds the key to all problems is therefore popular among most Dalits, particularly the upwardly mobile ones. Political power is simplistically equated with government power and all actions to secure it become legitimate. It is therefore that one finds all kinds of political acrobatics of dalit political leaders are condoned by Dalits. This dictum is skillfully used by the political class to create vast spaces for themselves to operate. Shiv Sena, which at one point publicly denigrated Ambedkarite Dalits and even Ambedkar, distinguishing them from the other Dalits, could be expected to be just an anathema but no more. Prominent Dalits have entered and exited Sena without any dent to their image. There were sterile noises created among the intellectual circles when an alliance was mooted between Ambedkarite and Shiv Sena forces, summed up in an idiotic algebraic equation: 'Shiv Shakti+Bhim Shakti=Deshbhakti', but when it is becoming a reality in Maharashtra, there is no clear disapproval



of it. On the contrary it is given respectability by making it an issue of discussions in seminars. There is still no clear condemnation of it from Ambedkarite Dalits in Maharashtra.

BSP's entire politics, in the face of huge contrary data, is resting on the apologia that political power will automatically mean dalit emancipation. Politics by default means parliamentary politics in dalit circles. Other forms of agitational politics have been completely overshadowed by it. Somehow, except for the early phase of Ambedkar's struggle, his entire career is mapped by statesmanship and parliamentary politics. Although, he was intellectually clear about the limitation of parliamentary politics vis-à-vis the interests of the majority of people, he could not articulate the alternate politics. Rather, he appears endorsing it through the Constitution. His early utterances soon after the adoption of the Constitution that there would be no need for agitational politics and Dalits should focus on constitutional means, also reinforced this notion among people. The experience of the last six decades, of utter non-representation of the concerns of dalit masses in policy formulation exposes the pitfalls of the parliamentary politics. Dalits find no solution in the current paradigm and see no prospects of changing it.

## **5. Crisis of Morality**

In Ambedkar's schema, morality acquires central place. His insistence on the necessity of religion as the moral source for society is rooted in this logic. Buddhism was not only meant to serve as an escape from the tyranny of Hinduism, but as the catalyst for moral armament of Dalits and larger society. This entire schema is disputed by many non-Ambedkarite but paradoxically the people who vehemently called themselves Ambedkarites have provided loads of proof for the former. Alas, Buddhism failed to bring in any such change in Dalits. It has merely become an additional identity marker for an Ambedkarite. It is no more a doctrine of social morality; Buddhism is used merely as a cultural identity. There is so much activity among a section of Buddhists, who argue that Ambedkarism should be

equated to Buddhism, in the sphere of learning Pali, building viharas, singing prayers, observing rituals and lately going for vipasana. There entire emphasis is on the individual deliverance through spiritual sublimation of mind. Their conscience is not hurt to see the misery of their own brethren around. Rather the kind of Buddhism they follow distances themselves from the world. The social becomes irrelevant for them. They could deal with fellow humans as they like and still be Buddhists. Indeed, that is what is precisely happening in the circles of upwardly mobile Dalits who overtly profess Buddhism. They would not have any qualm in indulging in corruption, misusing their position of power, siding with the degenerate elites, and being ruthless with common masses. Because their Buddhist vipasana has elevated them above these mundane matters!

## **6. Organizational crisis**

Dalit organization is characterized by the propensity to split. Dalit, for all practical purpose has been the name of a caste; it has never extended to its quasi class limits, encompassing all the untouchable castes and still the dalit organization has been splintering. Before consolidating Dalits, the dalit political entrepreneurs have ventured to create a larger constituency for themselves by combining with other backward castes as pioneered by Kanshiram. Enthused by his 'bahujan' strategy, many politicians followed suit variously without comprehending that the basic factor behind even the BSP's success in UP has not been the unity of Dalits and others but a large enough population of a politicised single dalit caste. The proof for this is provided by the failure of the BSP itself in replicating its success in UP elsewhere. Notwithstanding the anti-caste posture of the dalit organizations, they are heavily based on caste identity. It is forgotten that caste is fundamentally a hierarchy seeking category, which does not allow unity. The fundamental folly of the dalit movement is that it has not comprehended that caste cannot be the category to articulate any radical struggle. The usual reasons cited for the splintering tendency of the dalit organization are: With spread of education and material prosperity, Dalit, unlike earlier times would

not accept subordinate position; there is so much ideological confusion to expect cohesion; there are allurements from the ruling class parties, there is a disconnect between leaders and masses, and so on. These reasons, although partly true are not basic and they rather serve to reinforce the basic tendency of caste to disunite.

## **7. Crisis of Living**

The vast majority of Dalits have been facing crisis of living, particularly since the neoliberal reforms in the country. These policies have largely created crisis in rural area where almost 88 percent of Dalits live. The dwindling public as well as private investment in agriculture has drastically affected agricultural production. The investment deficit in non-farm sector before the recent launch of the NREGA scheme, creating some jobs in rural areas, had serious impact on incomes of rural poor. The impact of these policies could be seen in many a worsening developmental indicator in respect of poor in general, rural poor in particular and Dalits within them. Per capita food availability, which had been increasing steadily over the last six decades has gone down to 1950-levels. It declined from 186.2 Kg/annum in 1991 to 151.9 Kg/annum in 2001, which is reflected even in their lesser consumption. The share of agriculture and allied sector in the national income has been falling from 59 percent to below 17 percent today although the workforce relying on it has in fact increased in absolute numbers. In case of Dalits, the incidence of landless has increased during these years, presumably due to the land grab operations happening all over the country. The public healthcare system, already poor as it was, has further worsened during the globalization period. It reflects badly in the health parameters of poor, dalits hovering on the margins of the state of famine. Education, the most effective instrument of their emancipation has been completely commercialized and most Dalits are structurally cut off from quality education. Reservations, which held hope for Dalits of getting job, and so motivated them to get educated, has disappeared, its growth over the decade (1997 to 2007) has been minus 9.6 percent. Barring less than 10 percent Dalits, who could be

seen having come up during the last six decades, for the majority of Dalits this is a veritable multifaceted crisis.

### **Causes of the Crises**

Given the deep divide among the Ambedkarites, these crises may not be easily acknowledged because most of them are faced by the dalit masses who rarely count except for crowding the processions and congregations referred to above. They have been under the spell of educated urban Dalits far too long to see the things differently even when they adversely affected them. As a matter of fact, their concerns which are verily rooted in the land question were never taken up except for the symbolic land struggle that took place in Marathwada in 1953 at the suggestion of none other than Babasaheb Ambedkar and a nationwide satyagraha of 1964 that happened under the leadership of Dadasaheb Gaikwad. The entire dalit movement revolved directly or indirectly around the issue of reservations. As a matter of fact, the upper layer of Dalits is by and large detached from the dalit masses. Its concern for them only stem from their aspirations to further thicken itself through political medium.

As for analyzing the causes, the first response from Dalits would be to externalize them. Dalits are particularly wont to do that self-righteously. They have easy solution for every of their ills: just blame someone, if not Brahman. It is Brahman who deceitfully devised caste system and enslaved them. Dalits were the great people but the Brahman cheats reduced them to subhuman level with their scriptural intrigues. Dalit culture has been far superior, but is undermined by the hegemonizing Brahman culture. It is not to deny the intrigues of Brahmins in enslaving Dalits, but merely repeating this blame externalizing rhetoric tends to blind Dalits to look inwards for some of their weaknesses too, which is more important from the viewpoint of their emancipation. For instance if someone played cheat with them, the complementary truth will be that they were cheated, which could have been possible only because of some weakness in them. This perspective only can help them charting better future for

themselves. Externalizing blame might psychologically comfort the victim but actually it does not help him getting over his weakness in material term. While introspecting what has gone wrong, the Ambedkarites would be better off searching their own self for internal deficiencies before locating external forces responsible for them. In most cases, the internal deficiency comes handy for the enemy to make inroads and aggravate it to his advantage. If one considered even the crises in above enumeration, one can be sure about at least one thing that Dalits should squarely own up, which is the confusion about their ideological anchor. Now the source for this confusion needs to be located within, it surely cannot be externalized. Once noted, the external forces will surely exploit it. But it should be conceded that it verily exists within.

Indeed, the proliferation of Ambedkarites can primarily be attributed to the hazy notion about Ambedkarism. There would be no problem anyone claiming to be Ambedkarite, if Ambedkarism had been just an inconsequential creed. But problem with Ambedkarism is that it is the ideological anchor of a potentially revolutionary class. This basic fact would keep the ruling classes on alert about Ambedkarism. They would be on look out for the opportunity to blunt its radical edges. Even if Ambedkarism was precisely contoured, the adversary class could strive to blur it so as to deflect the ideological focus of the masses. But if it is inherently hazy, it makes their task so much easier. The inroads the right reactionary Sangh Pariwar could make among Dalits with their samarasata strategy should serve as a good example. Before we consider the aspect of Ambedkarism, it would be fruitful to understand its evolution to the present form.

As it stands, the recognition of Babasaheb Ambedkar by the establishment has passed through a phase of extreme reluctance to acknowledge his contributions and has reached today to his deification. Initially there were attempts to belittle him as just a leader of his own caste, then one of the leaders of Dalits. This phase ended by early 1970s with the rise of backward castes into powerful regional parties threatening the monopoly of the national parties

dominated by the traditional dwija castes. The politics became increasingly competitive and all political parties sought support from the readily available caste blocks and when not available, tried to create them. Dalits, already noted as one such block, were wooed by co-opting their leaders and were weakened as an independent political force. The value of the cooptation strategy lay in the premise that leaders were followed by the people. But as fallout of this strategy, the dalit masses soon got disenchanted with their self-seeking leaders and ceased to follow them. Such a fragmented mass tends to become independent and hence too expensive to manage. The ruling classes needed some means to reconsolidate them. This was achieved by constructing an Ambedkar icon. On the other side, as the disillusion with leaders grew, the masses nostalgically leaned towards Babasaheb Ambedkar, as an iconic figure. These two processes resonated into creation of Ambedkar icons, sourced from the persona of the historical Ambedkar but sans complexity and profundity of the latter, so as to have a mass appeal. It was systematically promoted with flowery tributes; erecting memorials, facilitating congregations, celebrating anniversaries and so on in order to bind masses with the icon. Now it was so much simpler for the ruling classes to play with the sentiments of the entire dalit mass through these icons. Building Ambedkar statues and monuments, naming roads, squares, programs and institutions after him, promoting research, seminars, conferences on his thoughts, etc. picked up great momentum. BSP's maintenance of its dalit core through these things may also serve an example. Commensurate with these simplified icons, the simplistic quips of Babasaheb Ambedkar served as multiple Ambedkarisms.

The real Ambedkar had only tenuous relation with these icons in use, inasmuch as the latter picked up just a facet or a part of him. Icon served in communicating Ambedkar to masses albeit in distorted form. Ambedkar was complex because he struggled creating his own spaces during the most dynamic and contentious period of the last century. He was dealing with the problem of caste for which he did

not have much reference to go by except for the stray attempts by some people. There was no theorization that he could bank upon and had to create his own while struggling with his own learning. Theorization moreover was not his objective; it was mere aid to practical struggle that he waged, for which he had to organize people and lead them through the cobweb of issues. Later, he found himself catapulted to the exalted position of a statesman and at the end taking refuge in Buddha. Even this superficial view of his life can lead one to see him struggling in search of the truth and simultaneously evolving in thought and action. It was therefore that he dismissed consistency as a virtue of an ass. He was mostly a Deweyan pragmatic who confronted things as they unfolded. It is indeed difficult to capture a neat philosophy of Babasaheb Ambedkar because it presents various strands of thoughts dominating in each phase of his life and struggle. His life and mission certainly projects a vision of an ideal society based on liberty, equality and fraternity. But there is no unified system of thought that explains how this state would be achieved, save for an article of faith that sees it everywhere. It is clear that he saw Dalit emancipation as a universal project, an integral part of the emancipation of mankind and not of a particular people, while working it out however from particular to universal. In various phases of his life he emphasized various thoughts in diagnosis of the problem or indicating solution to it. They do not easily cohere. For instance, his initial vision was to attempt reforms of the Hindu society. Since it did not happen, he tried getting special rights for Dalits through political process. At the end, he emphasized social morality by embracing Buddhism. If one recounts his writings, they add to these variants in their emphasis.

It is therefore that some scholars like Upendra Baxi saw many Ambedkars in his persona. Baxi identified as many as seven Ambedkars in his discourse. The first Ambedkar is an authentic Dalit who bore the full brunt of the practices of untouchability. The second Ambedkar is an exemplar of scholarship. The third Ambedkar is an activist journalist. The fourth Ambedkar is a pre-Gandhian activist.

The fifth Ambedkar is in a mortal combat with the Mahatma (Gandhi) on the issue of legislative reservations for the Depressed Classes. The sixth Ambedkar is the Constitutionist involved in the discourse on transfer of power and the processes of Constitution-making. The seventh Ambedkar is a renegade Hindu, not just in the sense of the man who set aflame the Manusmriti in Mahad in 1927 but in his symbolic statement on conversion in 1935 and his actual conversion to Buddhism in late 1954. [Upendra Baxi, 'Emancipation and Justice: Babasaheb Ambedkar's Legacy and Vision' in Upendra Baxi and Bhikhu Parekh (eds.), *Crisis and Change in Contemporary India*, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1995, pp. 124-130.] And this is not the only way; one could have very different approach to see different Ambedkars.

The complexity at the level of practice gets compounded when one deals with the thoughts informing it. One who objectively strives to search a philosophical strand in Ambedkar, finds it extremely difficult because it appears flowing, evolving. Indeed, Ambedkar thought incessantly evolved, in search of the truth. As is well known, through his early socialization, he had belief in moral and spiritual anchoring for being better human beings. His family belonged to Kabirpanth, which was the most progressive creed among its likes, believing in radical equality of humans. When he went to Columbia, he was greatly impressed by the liberal tradition of the West and to find a different world that did not have castes. He imbibed much of liberalism but did not get bound by it. Actually, Ambedkar was influenced by all the major political traditions of his times, viz., liberal, conservative and radical. The unique feature about him is that he had transcended all these traditions. He was greatly influenced by the ideas of John Dewey, the pragmatic American, Fabian and his teacher at Columbia. The Fabian Edwin R. A. Seligman, his Ph D Guide had considerable impact on his thought. He often quoted Edmund Burke, the conservative British thinker, quite approvingly. He studied in London School of Economics (LSE), which was actually founded by the Fabian society and the founders of Fabianism, Sydney



and Beatrice Webb among them, still being around as professors in LSE. Ambedkar's all radical materialist ideas can be seen belonging to the Fabian frame. But at the same time he always believed in the utility of religion as the moral anchor for the constitution of the society and thus reflected idealist strand in his thinking. Thus his thoughts span across the extremes over continuums of thoughts: one, from liberalism to conservatism to radicalism and two, materialism to idealism. They reflect *prima facie* extreme contradictions, which are not easy to reconcile. Those who speak easily about Ambedkarism or Ambedkar's philosophy should understand the complexity underneath in defining them. When Ambedkar spoke "My social philosophy may be said to be enshrined in three words: liberty, equality and fraternity", he expresses his philosophical vision, not his philosophy. Philosophy as a critical enquiry, different from philosophy as wisdom or philosophy as ideology, needs to be constructed by taking into account many other things he said and wrote, along with the extension of the same statement; "My philosophy has roots in religion and not in political science. I have derived them from the teachings of my master, the Buddha." It might appear that Buddhism sums up his philosophy, but even then it will have to be really constructed to deal with the contemporary world, a la Buddha and His Dhamma. Without such construction, to speak of Ambedkarism in amorphous manner is to offer it to be misused by the vested interests as it is happening today. Any and everybody can speak of Ambedkarism and become Ambedkarite and do anything he or she likes. This may be reckoned as the source of our ideological confusion informing the centrifugal tendency in the movement.

The fluidity of Ambedkarism makes it so much easier for the ruling classes to exploit it. If we had a well defined Ambedkarism, rooted in struggle and hence internalized by masses, it would not be amenable for easy distortion. Ruling classes will do all in their power to prevent the ruled classes from having a radical philosophy. But they cannot succeed in such attempts if it is well integrated into peoples' struggle.

They may make attempt for its refutation but cannot think of distortion. They may try out all strategies in their armor: cooptation to repression. But if the people are laced with a solid philosophy, they can defeat all such strategies.

Philosophy that grips people is a live force. It may be backed up by academic construction but more than that it is shaped and communicated through the struggles of people for their rights. Any philosophy, howsoever, it might be propounded by its originators, to be the weapon in peoples' hand needs to be shaped and reshaped through peoples' struggle. Ambedkarism, when it was not given in the form of a neat thought system, particularly needed to be conceived only through Dalit struggle on their core issues. Ambedkarism could be constructed through the dialectical contention of peoples' experiences with their practical struggles and Ambedkar's thoughts. His grand vision (liberty, equality and fraternity) could be the beacon, the inspiration for such a project. Ambedkarites have surrendered the medium of struggle with their excessive obsession and haste for securing political power. It is one thing to acquire political power through peoples' struggle and quite another to get it by allying with the existing powers. The former is earning and the latter is alms. The former is concrete and the latter is a mirage. For the profile of Dalits, a huge mass of predominantly landless labourers, suffering from every conceivable deprivation, the struggle against the power structure is the only way to secure their rights and build up political power. Babasaheb Ambedkar's vision was a beacon to inspire such a struggle and to shape up Ambedkarism through the process of practical interpretation of his sayings and writings. Moreover, struggle is the best mode for political education of people, best fortress to protect its ideological resources from pollution; the best gym to steel their resolve. Ambedkarites have missed this grammar and ran after the mirage of political power shunning the struggle. By putting the horse before the cart, they have allowed an army of petty power brokers to rise from among them in the garbs of leaders. Once it happened, these power brokers would use any and

everything to remain in power. This is what precisely happened to Ambedkarites. The masses would lament about, crib against, be angry with their leaders but would not know what to do to them. Others would bask in the hopes of benefits that they possibly bring them.

Another malady the Ambedkarite Dalits face may be called statism, a belief that state is the epitome of power, a just and an impartial referee, the benefactor of Dalits. It is not easy to fathom the sources of this orientation. It is easy to imagine the utterly powerless people relying on state as a repository of power; at least because they cannot confront the might of the state in any case. But it still would not mean missing the character of the state and surrendering all the strategies to totally depend on it. The state as per the theory is essentially a coercive instrument in the hands of the ruling classes, the preserver, a guard of the current order. It could do many things but within the framework of the present order. It would not easily do things that defy this order. So, Dalits could only expect certain palliatives from the state at the maximum. However, what they need is the change in the structure, which no state would reconcile with. It warrants change of the state itself, which no state can stomach. Dalits ought to aim at such a change and strategically orient themselves towards it. The tactics are conditioned then by this strategy. But what has happened is that they have whole hog become statist, the props of the state. They do not see value unless the state valorizes it. This statism has precipitated into a political culture of Ambedkarites. The source of this orientation may be located in Babasaheb Ambedkar, who strategically did not want to antagonize the colonial state in his basic fight with the hegemonic forces behind the hindu social order, and rather made use of it wherever possible. He never denigrated the state as an institution, believed that a constitutional state was the necessity and contributed to its building and so on. He ascribed the ills of the state to the vileness of people who manned the state. But one needs to go beyond these superficial observations and understand what kind of state he meant by constitutional state. His conception of

the state was such a structure which was unalterably ordained to guarantee social justice and oriented to create a society based on liberty, equality and fraternity. That is why he wanted the economic structure of the society should be hardcoded into the constitution itself so that it would not be easily tinkerable by anyone in future. The States and Minorities alludes to what he had in his mind. But what happened was totally contrary. It may be easy to lament over this but we must introspect and see that such a notion was rather not practicable. The fact that he could not even put forth his views before the Constituent Assembly, despite being in the driver's seat, provides the proof of it. His later statements about the Constitution would add to this proof.

This has certainly come handy for the opportunist elements to further their self interests by being adjuncts of the ruling people. They used Ambedkar's representational logic to fool the people by presenting their pursuit of power and pelf would be the power of Ambedkarite masses and the later believed it.

We will leave it at this and go over to see the challenges before us.

### **Challenges before the Ambedkarites**

The foremost challenge before Ambedkarites is to construct Ambedkarism as a guiding philosophy for the struggle of the dalit masses. Ambedkar for this exercise is not to be confined with the historical Ambedkar, he is to be the complete armour for Dalit struggle. The historical Ambedkar is certainly a major source for constructing but to that we may have to add the experience of last six decades of struggle. There is much in Ambedkar that is still profound, that could be used to forge this armour. Much of it has been mishandled by people, soiled, distorted, blunted and corroded. We may have to clean it up, repair it, sharpen it and reconstruct it. One must understand that Ambedkar's has been a dynamic thinking; any snapshot of it could only be misleading. Ambedkar's has been a great search because nothing in the traditional repertoire of philosophies he

found useful for the problem at hand. One cannot say that his search ended with his life. One will have to fathom the undercurrents behind his search, weigh them out and construct a viable philosophy. It will have to be extrapolated to deal with the contemporary problems. In process of this construction we would precisely come to know the limitations thereof and way to overcome them.

Such a construction should be mediated by the struggles of Dalits. It might appear as a chicken and hen syndrome but if we just orient to our focus to the majority of Dalits, it would appear immediately doable. Do we focus on the issues of their security of living, either in the form of land or secure employment; access to education of the quality as is available in the best of the schools in urban areas; health care facilities, sanitation, and such other problems? Do we concern ourselves with the the high incidence of anemia, nutrition deficiency, stuntedness of Dalit children? If we take up these issues, the way forward may be found. Our philosophy should be basically providing for these struggles. It will be enriched in course of actual struggle; the way the state responds to it, the manner in which various classes reacts to it. This is the only way to save Ambedkar as the weapon in peoples' hand. Such an exercise is desirable to block the processes of fooling the masses.

There are many other challenges which can be met even in parallel with the above exercise. The challenge is to critically review the dalit movement. We can ask questions such as: What is the implicit goal of the dalit movement? Is it annihilation of castes or to be the ruling caste? If it is to become a ruling caste, is it feasible? Which caste is to be the ruling caste? Because Dalit is not a caste; it is a quasi class, a conglomeration of all the erstwhile untouchable castes. If they were to be the ruling people, how do we construct Dalit? Based on caste as thus far or something else? If it is the annihilation of castes, why do we tend to see everything in caste term? Is it possible to annihilate castes with the organization based on castes? If not caste, then what could be the basis of the organization? Did we have a good enough understanding of castes, the obnoxious contrivance of our

dehumanization? What could be the strategy, standing in the present? What tactics? Who are our friends and who are foes? What would be the marker for accomplishment of our goal? If we ask these and such other questions, we would surely come to know what has gone wrong with our movement and what has been right with it. We would come to know that we did not even have a clear goal; that much of our discourse is based on rhetoric and not good understanding; that we did not even understand caste which has been the fulcrum of our struggle; that we did not have strategy; did not know our friends and foes; and in absence of all these we have gone in the opposite directions—strengthening castes instead of annihilating them.

We could also take stock of who we are fighting for and against? If it is for Dalits, then where are they? What are their basic concerns - immediate, medium term and long term? How do we unify these concerns in strategic terms? What has been the theme of our movement? Does it reflect the concerns of Dalits that we have found out? If not, how and wherefrom has it come? How can we correct it? Can we accomplish these concerns on our own? How can we reformulate the struggle? Who could be our allies? And so on. These questions will enable us to see that we have basically got our target wrong. Whereas our Dalits are rural people, illiterate, linked with land, our struggle was entirely premised on the educated, urban Dalits, who certainly do not represent vast dalit masses. How did we miss them? Was there any strategy in emphasizing reservations? Whose? What did we accomplish through it in relation to our goal? What corrections need to be effected in the current scheme? How do we do it?

State has been an important agent in the dalit struggle. In the times of Babasaheb Ambedkar it was a colonial state that he had decided not to antagonize in his contention with the caste Hindus. The assumption was that the state would be an impartial referee. Even then he had instances of frustration with the state during the struggling times. Does the same assumption hold good for the post-

1947 state? Dalits believe that the Indian state is based on the Constitution architected by their Babasaheb. They conveniently forget that he had disowned the Constitution many times. Just to remind another thing, he had submitted a memorandum on behalf of the SCF, “States and Minorities”, with a view to indicate necessity of hard-coding economic structure of the society into the Constitution. At those uncongenial times, he did not believe that he would reach the Constituent Assembly (CA). But as it later transpired, he not only had reached there but had become the chairman of its most important committee – the drafting committee. It remains as a historical lesson for the future generations that even through that exalted position; he could not make the Constitution to imbibe the spirit of the States and Minorities. Only once he did mention a part of it for CA’s consideration but mysteriously hastened to add that he would not insist upon it. He knew the way the CA was constituted and that it would be futile to persist with the radical agenda of States and Minorities. It is a veritable challenge for the Dalits to understand these and other associated aspects of the Constitution making to dispel their misconceptions. The state, if they take a hard look at it, is far bigger oppressor of Dalits than the so called Manuwadis in civil society.

One of the dominant lacunae of Ambedkarites that experience throws up is that they are mostly past-oriented. Much of the Ambedkarite discourse is rooted in the past. They seem to emulate Ambedkar who had to fathom the sources of caste and its components. Whatever its motivations may be, they appear relishing questions like who were the Shudras, who were Dalits? How the caste system originated? How the Dalits were Buddhists? How all the Hindu structures were Buddhist viharas? What were the Tirupati or Sabarimala or Vitthal temples? What Gandhi or Nehru did? The issues about the declining state of Dalits, that the incidence of landlessness has been increasing among them, or that the public domain employment has been consistently declining during the last decade marking thereby the end of net reservations, do not interest them. How has capitalism shaped

the world; do we understand the changes wrought in by the current paradigm of globalization? Where do we stand in it? Are we insulated from the geo-political dynamics? Do we need to understand and connect with other oppressed people like us elsewhere? Where do we stand in terms of our accomplishment vis-à-vis the Blacks in the US or Africa? Do we not have a role in the fight against the ongoing plunder of peoples' resources by the global capital? And indeed myriad such questions! The challenge therefore lies in dragging them out from the past to the present and push them to look at the future. Then only would they realize what changes have come in the caste system over the last century since the anti-caste movement began. Then would they realize that they are still whipping the snake mark, whereas the snake has already sneaked past them. Then would they realize that the contemporary reality is that they have to confront and not its past marks. Then would they realize that entire configuration of forces has undergone change while they were stuck in the past.

Once the Ambedkarites come into the present, they would automatically see the challenges before them. They can be likened to a legendary sleeping giant. When he is woken up, he would shake the world. I for one, would believe that Ambedkarites have been in trance, stupefied with wrong ideological doses. Once they woke up to the reality of their self and surrounding, the things would no more be the same for India.

Thank you.



## BSP's *Maya* and Dalits in UP

18 April, 2012

The single biggest shocking fallout of the recent assembly elections in five states is the big reversal that BSP suffered.

Just five years ago Mayawati had stunned everyone by winning 206 seats in the UP Assembly, well past the majority mark. In the hopelessly fragmented politics of the state, which had not seen the single party majority since 1993, this was a veritable feat that escaped all predictions of poll-pundits. As a matter of fact, no one has ever predicted BSP's rise in UP at any point in time. It always came as a bitter surprise in elite circles in which such games are played. 2007, was moreover the test of Mayawati's big gamble on '*sarvajan*' strategy abandoning the '*bahujan*' that had catapulted this daughter of an ordinary dalit to be the chief minister of the largest state of India, not once but three times. The process of cultivating bahujan with the slogans like '*tilak, taraju, aur talwar; inako maro jute char*' or abusively asking the upper caste members to leave the election meetings right at the beginning, was not yet completely forgotten. Nor were the promises made to dalits that all their problems would be solved with the master key of political power. People were skeptical about the sarvajan strategy really adding upper caste votes to the BSP kitty in face of the palpable danger of alienating some of the Jatava/chamars, who constituted her core constituency. The latter, and indeed all bahujans, stood by her rock like and won her unencumbered power. What has happened this time that the skyward trend (11.12 % votes in 1993, 19.64 % in 1996, 23.06% in 2002 and 30.43% in 2007) it created right since its foray into electoral politics in UP is reversed (to 25.91% in 2012) for the first time.

### Opportunity Squandered

2004 really offered Mayawati unprecedented historical opportunity to demonstrate how political power in a dalit's hand can make the

state look different from others. Never before then had a dalit risen to be the head of the state independently. Many Dalits had become chief ministers before but as a *dalit* mascots of the ruling class parties. The rise of the BSP itself with its aggressive projection of a party of 85 percent against the traditional ruling classes, albeit with caste count, was inspiring enough to common dalit folks particularly in the context of the collapse of the RPI experiment. Mayawati's previous stints were brief, the first in 1995 and the second in 1997 of less than six months each and the third little longer, of about 16 months, with the support from others could not be expected to make that kind of a mark. They were used to fortify her constituency. As she had declared during her first stint 'consolidation of dalit vote bank' was her 'biggest achievement' (The Pioneer, 23 October 1995, p. 9). Renaming public institutions and places after bahun icons, particularly Dr Ambedkar, erecting their statues across the state, creating new districts after them worked well to impose dalit presence all over the public space.

Notwithstanding this motive, some of the schemes she launched significantly benefitted dalits. For example, the Ambedkar village scheme she launched during her very first stint allotted special funds for socio-economic development to villages which had a 50 per cent SC population. In June 1995, during her second stint, she extended this scheme to the villages which had a 22–30 per cent SC population. All in all, 25,434 villages were included in the Ambedkar Village Scheme. The Dalits of these villages received special treatment since roads, hand-pumps, houses, etc., were built in their neighbourhoods. It is due to these material benefits that Dalits enthusiastically called her government as their own. People also were generally happy with her autocratic style of governance as it meant decisive response and improved law and order situation. Unfortunately, the imperatives of power misled her to commit excesses in identitarian fortification of her core constituency with huge investments in building Ambedkar and Kanshiram (and even her own) memorials and organizing gala birthday bashes.

Surely, she could have used her administrative prowess to curb atrocities on dalits with heavy hand, she could have improved basic public services such as education, health, and transport; made her administration people friendly and possibly tried to create village fora that would lead to weakening of castes. Instead, she adopted ultra feudal model with all regal pomp and darbar culture -- distancing herself from masses, distributing grants to her loyal and extracting rents from others in exchange of political favours. In the country where corruption is the way of life, she earned a dubious epithet of being most corrupt. While these traits could be considered as influence of political compulsions during her earlier stints; her fourth stint confirmed them to be her choice.

### **Marsh of Electoral Politics**

While Mayawati could surely accomplish the above indicated tasks of peoples' empowerment, the real question is whether she would have survived in politics. Do people really matter in our democracy? Yes, they do figure once in five years at the polling booths to decide their ruler. But this innocuous looking task involves management with intricate broking networks of castes and communities and huge upfront competitive investments to keep them oiled. These investments come from moneybags in the form of party funds and these days even from candidates who literally buy their candidature. The idea about the magnitude of the return on these investments can be had from the asset declarations of the candidates who contested two consecutive elections. The analysis provided by the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) and Uttar Pradesh Election Watch (UPEW) revealed that the average asset of the 285 re-contesting MLAs for UP 2012 elections increased from 1.21 crore (2007) to 3.56 crore (2012), giving the growth of 194 per cent. And these are just average! Paradoxically, as these returns looked upwards over the years, the voice of people, the metric of democracy, has suffered contraction.

Could Mayawati escape this inexorable logic of politics? The answer is certain no but as the fact reveals she has not been just a compliant but one who has outdone others in the game. Her BSP had the maximum candidates (120) who re-contested the elections whose asset grew by whooping 226 per cent from average Rs 1.22 crore to 3.97 crore. It is surely exceeded by the 'pacesetter' Congress (27) by 244 per cent, RLD (6) by 421 per cent, Qaumi Ekta Dal (2) by 343 per cent, and Ittehad-E-Millat Council (1) by 523 per cent, but they are insignificant in the numbers involved as indicated in the brackets against them. In the top ten re-contesting candidates by quantum growth in assets also BSP tops the list with his candidate from Allahabad – Nand Gopal increasing his wealth by 79 crores. BSP dominates the list with five candidates compared to INC's two and SP's one.

Money and criminality are not essentially disconnected. But insofar its measure as the registered cases go, is dependent on political power. Since BSP was in power, the criminality of SP, its arch rival may be amplified and that of BSP dampened. Notwithstanding this fact, the ADR/UPEW data reveals that BSP is not far behind in terms of putting up candidates with criminal charges. SP had maximum of 199 out of 401, i.e., 50 per cent candidates with live criminal cases against them. BJP, the self-proclaimed 'party with difference' stands next highest with 144 out of 397 (36 %), the INC comes the third with 120 out of 354 (34 %) and BSP is close fourth with 131 out of 403 (33 %) in terms of candidates with pending criminal cases. Look at BSP from any other angle; it would appear no different from any other ruling class party, fully sucked in by the marsh of electoral politics.

### **Illusion and Option**

The immediate comment Mayawati had on the election result was that her core constituency of dalits is still intact and that she will come back to power in 2017. It is a typical statement the Indian politicians make. What makes them so confident? Their confidence

actually stems from the great electoral system we have adopted to actualize our constitutional vision of giving ourselves a 'sovereign, democratic, socialist, secular republic'. The first-past-the-post type of electoral system thickens the hope of any party with solid backing of as less as 10 to 12 percent voters, which practically could be ensured only by castes and communities. It means that one could rule with the consent of just 10 percent voters or with much lesser electorate. Look at the paradoxes of this system: The Shiromani Akali Dal in Punjab got 56 seats this time with 34.75 percent as against Congress's 46 seats with 40.11 percent vote share. BSP's vote share in UP has declined only by 4.52 percent but it costs it a loss of 126 seats, i.e., 31.04 percent seat share.

Mayawati, for now is sure to go to Rajya Sabha and after five years, helped by the all pervasive mass dissent against any rule euphemistically named as anti-incumbency factor, and little fine-tuning of caste calculations will regain her throne of Lucknow. But what about Dalits, particularly the Chamar/Jatavas who are her core constituency? They do not have an easy option than clinging to her as they did. Contrary to the inference of some of the analysts based on the loss of reserved seats by BSP that dalits are deserting Mayawati, it appears that the core of BSP, as Mayawati claimed is largely intact. It is true that BSP has significantly lost the reserved seats since 2007: from 62 out of 89 in 2007 to just 16 out of 85 in 2012. But since reserved seats are not won or lost only on dalit votes, it would be erroneous to correlate them with dalit support or desertion. The Dalits in her core constituency will continue to support her as long as they see hope in BSP winning power, lest they should get beaten up in villages as is happening currently in UP at the hands of SP-goons.

While Mayawati is all the way winner, the Dalits in this game have been the certain losers. The illusion of political power as the master key for their emancipation has proved a chimera. They better realize that their real emancipation lies in the radical change of the system and not in being playthings of someone within it.

# Playing Foul With The Oppressed

08 August, 2011

In its name itself, Maharashtra dons the rhetorical armour of being “great”. In hard matters of economy, the colonial gift of Mumbai—the capitalist hub of India – still covers up its lack of development and puts it in the statistical lead in the ranking of states of the Indian union. In matters of culture and history, it takes for granted its pre-eminence; one of its litterateurs of yesteryears, Acharya Atre, wrote “Only Maharashtra has history; others have geography”. But when it comes to dalits and other such oppressed people, its rhetoric knows no bounds; it becomes a Mecca of social justice, a la Maharashtra of Phule-Ambedkar, notwithstanding the Khairlanjis and a callous record of dealing with caste atrocities.

The current instance of disowning its responsibility towards 13 lakh school students from these marginalised social groups goes beyond callousness; it reveals how the state government plays foul and unscrupulous games with the oppressed.

## ‘Freeship’ Scheme

From 1970 onwards, Maharashtra had a “freeship” scheme for the students belonging to the scheduled castes, vimukta jati, nomadic tribes and special backward classes. This arrangement has been reiterated through its circulars emphasising that students from these categories will get free education from Standard 1 to 10 in all schools irrespective of their parents’ income. In 1996, well after the adoption of neo-liberal policies, the government explicitly stated that this freeship will be applicable to all “non-government recognised, aided and non-aided schools” as per the standard rate. As such, the schools kept on getting a fee reimbursement for their students belonging to the above “backward” categories from the social welfare department of the government. Around 2000, a dispute arose because of a discrepancy between the amount sanctioned by the school education

department as the standard rate and the amount sanctioned for reimbursement by the social welfare department. At the instance of the courts, the government issued an order on 15 November 2000 that it would reimburse fees for all students at prescribed rates. On 27 May 2003, one more order was issued which, inter alia, said that “the fee structure and its quantum and criteria will be decided by the social welfare department and the Scheduled Tribes Department”.

Notwithstanding the convoluted circulars, which usually help governments to strangle whatever little progressive content their policies have, in this case the responsibility for reimbursement, whatever its quantum, was never denied. Interestingly, the scheduled tribe students were administratively segregated from these categories, their fees being sanctioned/reimbursed by the scheduled tribes department, entirely at different rates compared to those authorised by the education or social welfare departments.

### **Retrograde Retraction**

Then, without any communication, the social welfare department stopped reimbursement of fees to schools from 2007. The schools pursued the matter with the government for some time but to no avail. They were verbally informed that “it was a mistake” that they got reimbursements so far. The schools did not have any option other than to ask parents to pay the fees. Some schools carried on for some time, some threatened not to declare the results unless the fees were paid, and some simply asked the students to go away. Parents also responded variously according to their capability. The real sufferers were the students, who ultimately bore the brunt of the anxieties of their schools, as well as their parents. The matter was eventually taken to Court in 2010 by both.

On 21 December last year, the government pleader informed the Court that the decision on the report submitted by the committee constituted on 18 February 2010 recommending the rates at which reimbursement of fees should be made by the government would be

decided upon within a month. Secretaries of both the key departments, viz, social justice and finance, were present in the Court. The committee comprising the principal secretary, social justice, as president; principal secretary, tribal development department; secretary, school education department; and secretary, rural development department; as members, and director, directorate of social welfare, Pune, as member-secretary, had provided three options, but recommended a fee reimbursement at the highest rate (option 3), irrespective of the actual claims by the schools. It had provided an estimate of the number of students as 13 lakh and a rough calculation of the financial burden in a range from Rs 226.20 crore to Rs 382.20 crore, corresponding to option 1 and option 3. Contrary to its earlier indication that the government will take a decision on these recommendations, the government communicated to the Court its decision taken on 10 March 2011 that it will not reimburse fees. The Court noted that the stand adopted by the state government was not only arbitrary and unreasonable, but that it violated Article 14, Articles 21 and 21A read with Articles 45 and 46 of the Constitution, and hence ruled that the government reimburse the schools as per option 1 (lowest) along with the arrears within six weeks. It explicitly rejected the plea of the government to stay the order even as the latter had decided to appeal against the order in the Supreme Court.

Accordingly, the government should have deposited the amount of arrears with the schools by mid-June. But true to its character, it did not pay heed and pursued its case in the Supreme Court. The case came before the Supreme Court on 11 July; as expected it was dismissed. It might then be of some interest to anticipate the government's next move.

### **Self-Financing Schools**

Even if the government pays the amount to the schools, along with arrears for the previous years, which is the least expected of it, the problem will not be resolved. The school managements have already



submitted that the rates recommended by the committee under all the three options are lower than the rates at which they are constrained to charge fees from the students. Even the rate of Rs 350 per month per student in Standard 8 to 10 under option 3 is much less than what the schools needed, in view of the rising pay scales of teachers and other expenses incurred by the schools. The government had indicated that a committee formed under the chairpersonship of the minister (school education) with the minister (tribal development), minister (social justice), and minister (minority affairs) as members would examine whether the scheme implemented by the tribal development department can be applied to the students of the above categories. In the meanwhile, it has drafted a bill for self-financing educational institutions, which could become an Act soon, obviating the problem itself.

This is the real solution the government has in mind for the problem of financing education. The government takes credit for the Right to Education Act, conveniently hiding the fact that not only was it already enshrined in the Constitution but also that the Constitution had specifically mandated it to introduce the free and compulsory education to all the children up to the age of 14 years within 10 years of its coming into effect. The government was reminded of this responsibility by the Supreme Court in the Unnikrishnan case in 1993. It still played mischief by restricting the liability to cover children only in the 6 to 14 years age group, thereby excluding 170 million children through the 86th Constitutional Amendment Act in 2002 and then enacted the so-called Right to Education Act in 2009. It projected this retrograde step negating the concept of neighbourhood schools (providing the same standard of education to all children in the locality) as per the spirit of the Constitution, explicated by the first Education (Kothari) Commission in 1966, as a revolution. Actually, it legitimised the multi-layered education system that had mushroomed with the neo-liberal ethos. Notwithstanding these serious lacunae, the government appeared to undertake the responsibility as it promised to complete the task within five years, i

e, by 2015. But, it began shirking its responsibility right from the first year itself under the age-old alibi of a resource constraint and under its cover opened the floodgates for private capital to inundate the entire terrain of education.

### **Challenging Delinquent Governance**

In accordance with its constitutional obligation, the government extends freeships to the students belonging to the backward communities in the government and aided schools. It cannot arbitrarily shy away from this responsibility in non-aided schools, as they have basically come up because of its inability to provide education to all children. The case under review does not concern the scheduled tribe students just because they are paid for by a separate department. As such, it has not been a question of principle but a question of mal-governance in not having basic policy coordination across its various arms, viz, education, social welfare and tribal departments. Instead of being ashamed of this fact, it has the temerity to dismiss the whole issue saying “it was a mistake” that it reimbursed fees in the past – a mistake that squandered crores of rupees of the exchequer over many years without being accounted for! The government also came up with the standard alibi of a budget constraint.

Notwithstanding the exposure that the state government actually failed to utilise more than Rs 2,000 crore collected through the education cess and provided by the central government in the last financial year, a resource constraint cannot be a reason for not meeting the obligation in respect of fundamental rights. But who will pose such questions to the government? The fact that people have to go to Court against the government upon the violation of their fundamental rights by the latter bespeaks volumes of the representative character of the governing institutions of the democratic republic of India. In the present case, a poor vegetable vendor had gone to court as he could not afford to pay fees for his son and a nephew.

The whole episode depicts the plight of the majority of the people; those who are said to live off a paltry income of Rs 20 a day are impelled by the government to seek justice against its delinquency through the courts. Instead of waking up to its irresponsibility, the government persists with it and plays more foul games with people who challenge it. The insensitivity of the government in the subject case, jeopardising the future of 13 lakh students belonging to the backward classes, towards whom the Constitution swears special responsibility, is indeed striking, but is in no way an isolated case. It has become a mark of its character. Can people then be blamed if they resort to unconstitutional means to get justice?

# Imperial Justice And Indian Frenzy

04 June, 2011

*“Do unto others as you would have them do to you.” -Luke 6:31*

In the wee hours of May 2, President Barak Obama announced the killing of Osama Bin Laden saying “justice has been done”. Ending a manhunt of almost 10 years, he achieved closure of the 9/11 case and fulfilled his election promise. In a swift 40 minutes operation of an American counterintelligence and counterterrorism team of 79 people, code named Operation Geronimo, a prominent Native American leader of the Chiricahua Apache who fought against Mexico and the United States for their expansion into Apache tribal lands for several decades during the Apache Wars, unarmed Osama along with three other men and a woman were killed in a mansion in Abbottabad, Pakistan, without any intimation to the latter. Osama’s body was later disposed off into the sea.

There were varied reactions: expected jubilation in the US over the killing of their national enemy; bewilderment in people of Pakistan that Osama was found in their country and anger that the US could openly defy their territorial sovereignty and carry out the operation with impunity; media-mediated approval by many but a serious doubt by a few but saner ones about whether it was justifiable, seeing the portent of blatant defiance of international norms by the mighty. But the most comic reactions it evoked was in India, which vehemently wanted similar ‘surgical’ operation against its own enemies hiding in Pakistan.

## Imperial ‘Justice’

The manner in which the 9/11 incident was used by the US to declare its ‘war on terror’ and Osama was constructed into its kingpin and hunted across mountains and ravines of Afghanistan, Pakistan and perhaps elsewhere, the world had taken his death for granted. As Obama described, he was responsible for the killing of thousands of

men, women and children and hence deserved the death. Surprisingly few people raised voice against this process of doing justice to an unarmed old guy and four others against whom Obama would not have any iota of charge. The latter were absolutely innocent because neither they were criminal nor did they resist his Operation. They were done to death just with imperial arrogance. Even for Osama, it was just the American propaganda that he had masterminded the 9/11 attack. America could not provide a shred of evidence to establish his crime. He at best was a suspect and according to the international law and for that matter any jurisprudence deserved fair trial. But he was summarily done to death despite the circumstances that could allow his easy arrest.

Leave aside Osama, the operation was carried out in utter violation of the sovereignty of Pakistan. The US had temerity to explain that it deliberately kept Pakistan out of loop as it did not trust Pakistan. Instead of any apology for such a grave crime, the US defiantly declared that it would carry out more such attacks inside Pakistan. Just three days after Osama was killed, an US attack with remote-control aerial drones killed 15 people in Pakistan and wounded four. As per the CNN's Islamabad bureau there were 17 drone attacks killing 44 people in Pakistan's tribal region. There were 111 strikes in 2010, in which 957 innocent civilians were killed as per the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. Drone attack uses a programmed and unmanned aerial vehicle remotely controlled to strike targets supposedly with precision. The targets are reduced to carbonized bodies, only to be identified by unburnt limbs, flinging bystanders like dolls with shattered bones and fatal brain injuries. Osama was at least spared this horror by the Seals gunning him down but scores of innocent men, women and children in Afghanistan and Pakistan have not been as lucky. Handful though, but some U.S. officials have themselves broached the issue of whether it is right to use unmanned aerial vehicles against the real people labeled as "high value target" in faraway Pakistan or Afghanistan.

The US tries to cover up its crime with a fig leaf of an argument that it was a war action and not a police action; Obama was a war combatant and not a political leader. To decide what is war or not, US has a federal law that includes two bodies of code applicable to warfare – Title 10 and Title 50, the former protecting US troops from prosecution for murder or manslaughter when they kill an enemy soldier, and the latter relating to definitions of war and espionage, making the government's responsible for the consequences of armed conflict. Notwithstanding that they are the internal codes of the US, without any international sanction, many legal luminaries have opined that this was the CIA led and hence the Title 50 operation. In terms of the established jurisdiction it is clear that the US government has gone too far in playing the role of judge, jury and executioner. All its pretensions to legality of this operation cannot hide its imperial arrogance and injustice.

### **Who's Criminal: Osama, Bush or Obama?**

Osama is projected as a mastermind of the series of coordinated suicidal aerial attacks on 9 September 2001. On that morning, 19 Al-Qaeda terrorists hijacked four commercial passenger jet airliners and intentionally crashed two of the airliners into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, killing everyone on board and many others working in the buildings. Both towers collapsed within two hours, destroying nearby buildings and damaging others. The hijackers crashed a third airliner into The Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia, just outside Washington, D.C. The fourth plane crashed into a field near Shanksville in rural Pennsylvania while some of its passengers and flight crew attempted to retake control of the plane from the hijackers, who were to attack either the Capitol Building or the White House. There were no survivors from any of the flights. Nearly 3,000 victims and the 19 hijackers died in the attacks. This is the broad story given for public consumption but no explanation has ever come to the serious doubts raised against its veracity. Whether it is a simple energy balance, engineering details of structural collapse, chemical analyses of the remains, physical examination, or

mathematical verifications, the story miserably failed on each count. As a result, the experts have organized ‘Architects and Engineers for 9/11 Truth’<sup>1</sup> to systematically expose the truth behind the incident. While their efforts to know the people behind these attacks and their motives may not ever be complete, they have already concluded the above story as a lie. The air strike was used as an alibi but the twin towers and the nearby tower basically collapsed with controlled explosion, is proved beyond reasonable doubt. The story of Pentagon attack has been completely falsified. A three year independent investigation into it by the Southern California-based researchers has brought out new evidence which establishes that the violence in Arlington was not the result of a surprise attack by suicide hijackers, but rather a military blacked operation involving a carefully planned and skillfully executed deception.”<sup>2</sup> The poor souls who gave their lives in a Jihad against America were trained in and protected by the US Military and Bush; they were mind controlled patsies used by the Military Industrial complex to put on a show for them. Interestingly, there were no Arabs listed on the Manifest and all four crashed flights had exact 20 percent occupancy.

All the evidence and analyses show that the entire 9/11 was an intricately concocted lie for accomplishing some strategic objectives. One may not ever know what these objectives were, how and whether they were accomplished by whom and when but one thing is sure that Osama Bin Laden could not be the mastermind of this project. He only came handy as a character constructed entirely by the US agencies to anchor the lie. The making of Osama as a terrorist or construction of Jehadi-Islam by the US goes back to 1980s and is fairly well documented. When Soviet forces occupied Afghanistan, the US skillfully converted the Afghan peoples’ resistance into a theocratic-terrorist movement. Osama was deputed by the CIA to Afghanistan to finance and oversee the resistance to the Soviets. How the US and the CIA created Osama and his network has been well-documented in the book “Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia” by Ahmed Rashid, published by the

Yale University Press. Indeed, there is lot of weight in the thesis that the modern Jehadi-Islam is a byproduct of intrigues by the West to keep the Islamic world under its suzerainty, devoid of any kind of democratic processes and also to use it as a whipping boy occasionally whenever attention needs to be diverted from issues raised by anti-globalisation campaigners. Osama fitted in the scheme of 9/11 perfectly to project as a mastermind. His own admission should not count as it served him well in his natural evolution into an anti-US zealot. Thus the entire onus of crime of not only the 9/11 but thousands of death that followed thereafter shifts away from Osama.

### **Farcical Indian Reaction**

The episode evoked most farcical reaction in India. Beyond approval of this imperial arrogance, the media created a nationalist hysteria that the US should declare Pakistan as a terrorist state; that India should carry out similar surgical operation to kill the likes of Dawood Ibrahim and Hafeez Saeed, hiding in Pakistan. If one went by the TV shows, there appeared complete consensus among the neoliberal generation assembled there. There was not the slightest qualm about the right or wrong or even the consideration of consequences. Given that it was a traditional Hindutva motto, once more the dangerous fusion of Hindu nationalism with neoliberalism was completely swaying over sanity. It culminated in a faux pa by our army general VK Singh endorsingly stating that the military was capable of carrying out such an attack if mandated. The frenzy came to an abrupt stop with Pakistan's threat of dire consequences if any such misadventure is attempted. The issue is not whether India would actually execute such attacks, the issue is that the Indian elites think of it; aspire to be a regional bully, in complete disdain to the needs of vast majority of their own countrymen.



# Reflecting Dalit Movement In The Era of ‘Globalization’

Anand Teltumbde Interviewed By Yoginder Sikand

02 August, 2011

Mumbai-based Anand Teltumbde is a leading scholar-activist, who has written extensively on issues related to caste, class, imperialism and ‘globalization’. In this interview with Yoginder Sikand, he reflects on the Dalit movement in the era of ‘globalization’.

Q: You have written extensively on what you regard as the crises facing Dalits and the Dalit movement in contemporary India, seeking to articulate a caste-class analysis of Indian society. One of your major focuses has been the challenges Hindutva poses to the Dalits. You regard Hindutva as extremely inimical to Dalit interests and their struggle against ‘upper’ caste/class hegemony. Given, as you have written, Hindutva groups have made deep inroads among Dalits, how do you feel a progressive counter-cultural alternative can be presented to and popularized among Dalits in order to counter the attraction that Hindutva seems to offer them?

A: While Hindutva is a form of Brahminism and is definitely geared to suppressing the Dalits and serving the interests of the ‘upper’ caste/class elites, one should be clear that Hindutva is not entirely a cultural phenomenon. It is more of a political phenomenon. So, challenging Hindutva cannot be limited only to articulating a counter-cultural alternative, as some have sought to do in the name of Dalit identity-politics. Rather, Hindutva needs to be challenged politically.

As regards a counter-culture to Hinduism from the Dalit perspective, I am not sure if we have the resources for this or if sufficient attention has been paid to how to popularize this alternative given the immense hold of the Hindu framework. We may say, and rightly so, that the conflict between Brahminism and Shraminism, as represented by

Jainism and Buddhism, has been present throughout Indian history. On this basis, we may invoke the Shramanic tradition to critique Brahminism. However, we also have to admit that despite the immense popularity of the Shramanic traditions for over 10 centuries, the Brahmanic castes have survived; nay they have thrived. How does one explain it? These religions—particularly Buddhism—did offer alternatives to Brahminism at the philosophical level but, despite this, caste as a social reality did not vanish. I think the same can be said of the conversion of Dalits to other religions as a means for liberation from caste oppression. Dalits have converted to Islam, Christianity, Sikhism to escape caste bondage of Hinduism but this did not make much difference to their lives. Caste has rather infected these seemingly egalitarian religions, keeping its Dalits at the lowest rungs. In objective terms, not much is changed for the converts. While they continue to remain Dalits for others, among themselves they appear to follow the same cultural paradigm laid out by the Hindu framework, albeit with cosmetic changes. Babasaheb Ambedkar did expect a new cultural paradigm for the Dalits based on scientific rationality, but it remained an unfulfilled dream like many others. That is perhaps why many Dalits in Maharashtra have, unfortunately, not been averse to joining hands with Hindutva forces. Even many well educated Dalits with some social recognition did not see anything wrong in jumping onto the RSS's Samarasata platform which talked of the 'unity' or 'assimilation' of castes. Politically, Ambedkarite Dalits have been joining the Hindutva forces with impunity. The current alliance between Ramdas Athwale's RPI and the Shivsena-BJP combine under the guise of Bhimshakti+Shivshakti is a case in point. The fact that there is not much opposition to such ideas and actions bespeaks volumes about alternative culture. So, I would say, the hegemonic influence of the Hindu or Brahminical worldview still remains, and Dalits, as a whole, continue to operate within that cultural framework.

Q: If that is the case, then what is the alternative in terms of a counter-cultural challenge to Hindutva?

A: I think the alternate is only possible from the Left—not the parliamentary Left that still appears to cling to the idea, notwithstanding their wordy acrobatics, that religion and caste are simply ‘superstructural’ issues or of little or no importance, but a Left that is rooted in Indian social realities and recognizes the salience of these issues. Fortunately, some sections of the radical Left is developing such an understanding organically. If Dalits also review their journey so far objectively, I am sure they also will reach similar radical understanding. That said, I do not negate the importance of culture in both perpetuating as well as challenging an oppressive system, but, at the same time, I disagree with some Dalit ideologues who insist that cultural revolution must necessarily precede political revolution. The two must go together, working in a dialectical fashion. Alternate cultures do not develop in vacuum, just by wishing for them. They are born in the process of peoples’ struggles over the material issues of their living—essentially politico-economic struggles. I am sure the counter-cultural to Hindutva will also emerge from these sorts of mass-based struggles. I don’t see it as a question of one preceding the other in time in a mechanical way.

Q: Some analysts argue that focusing mainly on the issue of reservations and critiquing Brahminism, which, of course are necessary, sections of the Dalit movement have ignored the material issues and concerns of the Dalit poor. Do you share that analysis?

A: There is considerable truth in that assertion. By and large, the Dalit movement has been led and controlled by urban-based petty bourgeoisie Dalits, and has tended to neglect Dalits living in villages. If you consider the demographic profile of Dalits, you will find that Dalits are predominantly rural people; some 89 percent of them still live in villages. More than half of them are landless, 26 percent are marginal farmers and the rest are artisans. Of the 11 percent urban Dalits, a vast majority lives in urban slums and work preponderantly in the informal sector. Over the last six decades, a small layer—certainly not exceeding 10 percent of the total—has emerged out of them who could be considered as ‘arrived’, thanks to reservations,

political nexus and their enterprise. This small layer, however, has effectively hijacked the agenda of the majority of the Dalits and revolved it around the single issue of reservation. It reflects the urban- and class-bias of the Dalit movement that has persistently ignored the issues of rural Dalits. Reservations did have a utility for the first generation of Dalits but thereafter it increasingly became the monopoly of those who have come up, leaving the really needy out of its reach. It is a widely acknowledged fact that the caste issue is entangled with the skewed distribution of land or the high incidence of landlessness of Dalits. Even Babasaheb Ambedkar, towards the end of his life, had realized this fact and influenced some of his followers to take up the first land struggle in Marathwada. Thereafter, Dadasaheb Gaikwad, who was his close confidant and perhaps real political heir, had led a countrywide struggle for land. But, thereafter, we never hear of the land issue being raised within and by the Dalit movement. Lack of land, quality education, non-farm employment, proper housing and sanitation are the material issues that have historically been related to Dalit deprivation, and these have only been aggravated by the elitist 'globalization' over the last two decades. There is not a slightest reflection of these issues in the dominant Dalit discourse. Surprisingly, when reservations have effectively ended—statistically, from 1997 onwards the total employment in the public domain has been consistently decreasing—they shout louder about it.

So, yes, I sincerely think in the post-Ambedkar phase, the Dalit movement, driven by small elite among the Dalits, has completely ignored the material issues of most Dalits.

Q: But now that government jobs are rapidly shrinking in the wake of privatization and 'globalisation', which means that jobs for Dalits in the public sector are even more limited than they hitherto were, do you see a shift in the focus of the Dalit movement? Given that 'globalisation' and privatization are hitting the poorest of the poor, particularly Dalits, the most, is the Dalit movement responding by widening its concerns and addressing the challenges posed by

globalization, thus moving out of what you consider as its major concern with reservations?

A: I do not see a major shift happening, barring the fact that Dalit groups are now demanding reservations in the private sector and curiously campaigning about 'Dalit Capitalism'. This, once again, illustrates their elite, urban focus. I do not see them interrogating 'globalisation' and mobilizing Dalits against the havoc that is causing to the poor, leading to mass pauperization and rapidly widening social-economic inequalities. Statistics reveals that the incidence of landlessness has been increasing among Dalits during the last two decades of globalization. But, they are oblivious of these facts. The question of land, or the issue of landless Dalits and their forced displacement by mega-projects, has been a virtual taboo in Dalit movement because most Dalit 'leaders' think it is a 'communist' issue. They have been programmed into believing that communists are their enemies! They have been fed on lies, by many Dalit intellectuals and leaders, that Babasaheb Ambedkar was viscerally opposed to communism as such—although it is well-known that Babsaheb did see the importance of land issue and was a confirmed socialist, as is evident from his monumental book *States and Minorities*. They have systematically constructed an Ambedkar icon sans the radicalism of Ambedkar, with superfluous embellishments of Ambedkar ideology, projected it as a virtual god-like figure to the Dalit masses, and invoking it in support of whatever they do. This icon is used and duly supported by the ruling classes to build a kind of 'bhakti' cult in the Dalit masses. Now, it is absolutely clear that Babsaheb hated the 'bhakti' cult around him and explicitly said that that he did not want bhaktas but sincere followers. This cult facilitated 'brokers' among Dalits to sell their wares in his name, and the Dalit masses simply bought their wares. This is the unfortunate paradigm that has degenerated the Dalit movement and has effectively thwarted sincere elements from coming up. It is entirely because of this that there seems to be little or no effort to re-read or contextualize Babasaheb's thoughts in the contemporary context, including on issues related to

class-based deprivation. At a time when the Indian state, Hindutva forces and the forces of imperialism are playing such havoc with the livelihoods of millions of Dalits, whose conditions are rapidly going from bad to worse, I see few Dalit groups taking these crucial economic issues seriously. Instead, they remain fixated on reservations—because this is a convenient populist slogan—and on invoking the name of Babasaheb while refusing to re-read him in the context of the contemporary situation of caste/class deprivation.

Babasaheb Ambedkar said that he was against Brahmanism and not Brahmins, and even explained that Brahmanism could be found in any caste, including Dalits. Dalits have conveniently forgotten this essence and picked up the superficial. Today, the situation is such that groups whom they include in their Bahujans, the superset of Dalits, are the real perpetrators of atrocities on Dalits. They are the real baton holders of Brahmanism in villages. But this sort of political-economic analyses just do not appeal to Dalits, who are enamoured with identitarian discourse. To oppose Brahmanism is to be anti-caste; but to hate Brahmins is casteist. Paradoxically, swearing by Ambedkar, many Dalits today unconsciously reflect casteist behavior, and thus act against Ambedkar.

That said, we must remember that the anti-materialist outlook of Dalits is actually born out of their encounter with the Left movement, which refused to acknowledge caste question as something basic to the class struggle in India. Babasaheb Ambedkar was no Marxist. He had genuine problems with Marxism but at the same time he ardently believed in socialism of the Fabian kind. This was a good enough basis for working together with the Left and enriching the strategy for class struggle in the concrete situation obtaining in this country. But the Left continued undermining Dalit movement and, in the process, completely alienated it. The onus thus squarely lies with the Left for the fact that today we are faced with the divergent, almost antagonistic, movements of the proletariat, bogged down with an idiotic duality of class and caste.

The Left movement needs to rethink its perspective on the Dalit question. There is an urgent need for a dialogue between the Dalit movement and the Left, so that they can learn from each other and cross-fertilise each other. This will certainly help the Dalit movement in responding in a more appropriate manner to the changing nature of caste and helping it realize the importance of class issues and the need for class-based mobilization as well. I am uncomfortable with Dalit identity politics which only make the Dalit movement more sectarian and lead it away from the material problems, as experience shows. Caste as essentially a divisive category cannot viably serve even identity politics, not to speak of the goal of annihilation of caste. I am surprised that this basic understanding is yet to dawn on our social scientists as well as activists.

Q: How do you assess the role of the Dalit media in raising and communicating these issues which you feel Dalit groups have failed to take up?

A: There is not much of a Dalit media actually. There are several small magazines and periodicals run by Dalits all over the country. Some of them do raise valid issues faced by Dalits, but many others are simply tails of this or that political group. This connection may not be always visible but it does exist in terms of direct or indirect support coming from these sources. During the last decades, a curious development took place in Maharashtra in this regard. Some Dalits started daily papers, one after another. Today, there are at least half a dozen full-sheet daily papers run by Dalits in Maharashtra. They do satisfy rhetorical need of having our own media. One does not know how their economics is managed, however, given that newspapers basically run on advertisement revenue, which is largely absent in their case. The content analysis of these newspapers does not indicate that they have significantly contributed raising the live questions of Dalits or catalysed any movement around it. They just meet the identitarian need of having 'our' own media.

I do not know whether a media owned and operated by Dalits could really be called a 'Dalit media'. Most of Dalit papers reflect the concerns and interests of their readership—the 'reservationist' middle-class—and that is why they deal mainly with religio-cultural issues, besides, of course, reservations. They pay little attention to the issues of rural Dalits. Many of them are averse to taking up economic issues or to considering the need for a contextually-rooted class-cum-caste analysis of Indian society. Basically premised on the identity of Dalits, they often ignore other issues.

The media reflects to some degree the state of our intellectual activism. The tragedy is that we have few organic intellectuals who can articulate the concerns and interests of the Dalit masses. Instead, we have a whole lot of cut-and-paste intellectuals whose only task, it seems, is to rehash what others have written before them, refusing to engage in any creative intellectual work. The Dalit media eventually mirrors it.

Q: In recent decades, a number of NGOs have taken up Dalit issues and concerns, and Dalits are one of their major 'target' groups. How do you see the impact of this NGO-isation process on the Dalit movement in terms of highlighting Dalit issues and empowering the Dalits?

A: In terms of highlighting, and even internationalizing, Dalit issues, I think many NGOs have played an important role. Even documenting Dalit problems and issues I think is a major contribution, giving that little of this sort was being done by others. But, beyond that, especially in political terms, I think that, barring some cases, the role of NGOs has been problematic. At a fundamental level, NGOs depend upon donors, and, according to the dictum "He who pays the piper calls the tune", they have to eventually conform to the agenda of their donors. And the fact of the matter is that NGOs have been deliberately promoted as a vehicle of 'globalization' in the context of the declining role of the state in the social sector. Naturally, then, NGOs work, by and large, to depoliticize radical people's



movements. They work in a fragmentary manner, taking up discrete issues, and this promotes fragmentary consciousness in people around them, which is what neo-liberalism wants. By remaining confined to funded projects, they inherently lack a macro political-economic perspective, which again serves the interest of global capital. Moreover, they also attract youths who might otherwise have gone into people's movements or radical politics, by providing them salaries and job security, and in this way also work as agents of depoliticisation. You are right in terming this the NGO-ization of the Dalit movement. Before the Dalit movement could introspect on its degeneration, the influx of NGOs complicated the matters and made any such review extremely difficult.

Q: In your writings, you argue that 'globalisation' spells doom for Dalits. In this context, how do you see the argument, made by a group of Dalit 'intellectuals', who have been much-highlighted in the 'mainstream' media, of the need for the state and multi-national corporations to promote what they term 'Dalit Capitalism'?

A: I think this argument is completely fallacious and dangerous. It buys into the imperialist logic, and is geared to serving the interests of foreign capital and the Indian ruling classes, who are well aware of the pauperisation of the Dalits and their mounting opposition to the system that is destroying their already shattered lives in the name of 'development'. This slogan of 'Dalit Capitalism' is being actually sponsored by some Western organizations linked to global capital. There is not much of guess work needed to see who the sponsors and supporters of this idea are. As a matter of fact, the idea has been floated by a bunch of individuals who are projecting some Dalit entrepreneurs as though they were the new breed produced by globalization. And this is being propped up by the 'mainstream' media, which is otherwise shy of touching anything Dalit. The Economic Times has published a series of features on it, and the rank neo-liberalist Swaminathan Ankalesvaria Aiyer wrote several pieces extolling the idea. As for the Indian state, the Planning Commission, which otherwise refuses to move on the continued stealing of special

component monies meant for Dalits, has been enthusiastically considering how to channel the public funds to these Dalit capitalists. It is a pity that Dalits do not see through the game and, instead, are getting enamoured with the idea because of their identitarian fixation.

I do not think there is anything intellectually appealing about the notion of 'Dalit Capitalism'. I would rather say that this notion is itself a contradiction in terms and smacks of ignorance of both Dalits as well as Capitalism. The Dalit entrepreneur is not a new species. Dalits have historically been entrepreneurs, grabbing whatever opportunities that came their way and made progress. Rich Dalits are also not a new phenomenon. There have been many rich Dalit individuals since colonial times. So, to claim that Dalits have only started progressed now as a result of supposedly benefitting from 'globalization' is simple and pure falsehood. To impute the progress that a small number of Dalits have made in recent years to 'Dalit Capitalism' suggests is fallacious. Although, knowing the systemic character of capitalism, I would never be the votary of capitalism, I am not so dogmatic as to discard it either merely for ideological reasons. After all, there is a dialectics that will determine the time of its death. I do not have any quarrel, therefore, about Dalits becoming big capitalists and amassing their billions. But what irks me is this motivated attempt by the proponents of the notion of 'Dalit Capitalism' to create a patently false impression that Dalits have benefitted by 'globalization', that Dalits have now 'arrived', that Dalits have abandoned socialism and have embraced capitalism. The vast majority of Dalits still live in horrendous conditions in villages and urban slums as the wretched of the earth, and their conditions are, as I said earlier, going from bad to worse, rather than improving, as a result of the ravages of capitalism and 'globalization'. The relative distance between Dalits and others on most developmental dimensions was reducing until the 1990s but the recent trends clearly show that the gaps are widening. By WHO standards of body-mass index, Dalits would be famine-stricken community. To speak about

such people in terms of 'Dalit Capitalism' is nothing but an unpardonable cruel joke.

# Celebrating Babasaheb Ambedkar In Lahore

01 May, 2011

*Speech in the Ambedkar Day Seminar organized by Sir Ganga Ram Heritage Foundation in Pearl Continental, Lahore on 26. April, 2011*

At the outset let me thank Sir Ganga Ram Heritage Foundation for inviting me to Lahore and giving this opportunity to share my thoughts with you. This is my second visit to this beautiful city, which was eulogized by the people as the must see for every human being that comes on the earth. When I received the first invitation from the Foundation in 2009, I was curiously surprised at the connection between Sir Ganga Ram and Dr Ambedkar, whom India affectionately calls Babasaheb. Sir Gangaram was a remarkable man, who contributed to undivided India in immense measure in terms of its physical infrastructure. I feel proud to belong to his biradari as an engineer, although not quite the same discipline as he practiced. Dr Ambedkar's contributions may be rivaled by few in the spheres of socio-political and spiritual infrastructure of Indian subcontinent and in the nation building of India. There was no direct connection or commonality between Sir Ganga Ram and Dr Ambedkar except for the fact that both contributed to the betterment of people of this subcontinent without consideration of caste, creed, or community. I must complement the foundation for taking the noble initiative to commemorate Dr Ambedkar in Pakistan who notwithstanding the dividing line between the two countries, is as much revered by over 2.5 million of Dalits in Pakistan as the Dalits in India. In a symbolic manner, this initiative marks the concern of the foundation and to the extent the Government of Pakistan supports the Foundation, it's own concerns to these teeming millions. One hopes, through this initiative and the exchanges with the people like us from other countries in the subcontinent, the government would be sensitized to appreciate the demands of Dalits in Pakistan and take a lead in the spirit of Islam to

ameliorate their woes. In fact, it could set an example for other countries to emulate by completely annihilating castes from Pakistan.

This seminar is basically in celebration of the 118th birth anniversary of Babasaheb Ambedkar. Although, his birth anniversary is celebrated world over by the spreading Dalit Diaspora and even by the non-Dalits, who are impressed by the humanist import of his contributions, the people from Lahore must know that there is an important connection between this city and Dr Ambedkar. In 1936, the Jat Pat Todak Mandal of Lahore, which was an organization of the Arya Samaj, had invited him to preside over their conference. Babasaheb Ambedkar had prepared his presidential speech and sent it to the Mandal as per their request. The Mandal found the speech to be too critical of the Hindu religion and requested him to soften it. Dr Ambedkar refused to comply and instead declined the invitation. This undelivered speech in the conference that did not take place was published with an ominous title “Annihilation of Castes”, which would become a war cry of his movement. This book is likened by some scholars to the Communist Manifesto of Marx and Engels. Although Dr Ambedkar did not visit this city, it got permanently associated with his schema of Dalit emancipation.

I might indicate a few more connections between you and Dr Ambedkar, so that Pakistani people have better appreciation of his contributions. This connection spans across his deep appreciation of egalitarian and humanist spirit of Islam, sense of cordiality and fraternity in Muslim community, as well as his scholarly illumination of the idea of Pakistan, which in some degree may have contributed to making of your nation.

Islam came to India as the invaders’ religion but had catalyzed creation of emancipatory vision among the low caste people, particularly the non-caste Dalits, who were denied their humanity by the Hindu religion. It provided them the first escape route from the bondage of hindu social order. The egalitarian Islam naturally appealed to them. As a result, whosoever could manage had

embraced Islam and became Muslalmans. There was an exodus of sorts of these people from Hinduism, which the right wing-Hindus attribute to the force of sword used by the Muslim rulers. Although the Islamic marauders did use sword, the conversion of Dalits, who existed only on the margins of the society, could not be their target. Their attack was basically on the Hindu temples, which were not just the abodes of gods or the places of prayer, but also the warehouses of enormous wealth. History testifies that all the warring kings, including the Hindus, often attacked Hindu temples for this wealth. As for the conversion of Hindus to Islam, none other than the great Hindu seer, Swamy Vivekanand, has written that almost one-fifth of the Hindu population was lost to Islam and not because of the force of sword as commonly believed but because of its egalitarian appeal.

This appeal had become palpable when Babasaheb Ambedkar began exploring alternate religious options after having realized that there was no possibility of reforms from within the Hindu society. As you may know, after returning from New York and London, laced with two doctoral degrees and a barristership from the prestigious universities/institutions, he began his public life by leading an epic struggle at Mahad, some 100 odd kilometers away from Mumbai. This struggle began in the form of an innocuous conference on 19 and 20 March 1927, ended with a collective march to the chavadar tank, which was hitherto proscribed for Dalits, to draw its water. The caste Hindus reacted with their cowardly attack on Dalits, who were returning to their homes. Provoked by the incidents, Dr Ambedkar decided to launch a satyagraha at the same place in the month of December, the same year, exclusively targeting the chavadar tank. However, just on the eve of the satyagraha, some caste Hindus had fraudulently obtained an injunction from the court that since the tank was a private property, sDalits could not trespass it. The case dragged on for the next 10 years, disillusioning Dr Ambedkar completely about the possibility of bringing about reforms from within. The main thrust of these struggle was to sensitize the Hindus about their evil customs and traditions so that they would be motivated to

undertake due reforms. Far from this happening, the caste Hindus rather played all kinds of tricks in their store to frustrate Dalits.

Just after the Mahad satyagraha, in 1928, in a public meeting at Jalgaon, he had given an ultimatum to the Hindus that if they had not come forward for reforms the Untouchables would renounce Hinduism and become Musalmans. This might have been a passing threat but some 20 odd people from his followers took it literally and became Muslims. The appeal of egalitarian Islam in the project of Dalit emancipation would surface off and on in Ambedkar's early considerations.

Dr Ambedkar gave up the path of satyagraha although he did not discourage his disciples from undertaking them. He shifted his attention to the opportunities opening up with the British thinking to involve the natives in the governance of the country. Already there had been Morley-Minto reforms which led to promulgation of the India Act, 1909 and Montagu-Chelmsford reforms and the Southborough Commission leading to the India Act, 1919. When the all European Simon Commission visited India, the Congress had boycotted it but Dr Ambedkar and Muslim League cooperated with it. These efforts culminated in his invitation to the three Round Table Conferences in 1930-32. He came in contention with Mahatma Gandhi in the RTC over the issue of representation of the Untouchables. Gandhi claimed that he represented all the Hindus, the Untouchables included. Dr Ambedkar successfully refuted it, and as the representative of the Untouchables, forcefully advocated separate electorates for them. When the award was declared by the Prime Minister Ramsey Macdonald conceding the demand of Dr Ambedkar for separate electorates, Gandhi went on his fast unto death protesting against it. The situation became threatening to Dalits, which impelled Ambedkar to compromise by giving up the separate electorates in exchange of increased numbers of reserved seats in joint electorates.

With the accumulated bitter experience with the caste Hindus and their leaders, he saw no hope in staying in Hinduism and declared in 1935 in Yewale (near Nashik, a prominent town in Maharashtra State) that he would renounce Hinduism. He said, it was not in his power to be born as Hindu, but it is squarely in his not to die as one. This vow created huge ripples across the country because if the 16 percent untouchables of whom Ambedkar had emerged as the sole leader followed him, the entire communal configuration of the country would change. Religious heads of various religions began hobnobbing with him with allurements. It created confusion among the Untouchables too. And hence to explain his decision to the leaders of his movement, he had called a meeting in Mumbai in 1936. The longish speech that he made in that meeting is considered very important and is aptly titled as Mukti Kon Pathe in Marathi (“Which way the Deliverance?”, in English). He started his speech with the commonplace issue of atrocities on Dalits. He asked, why the caste Hindus inflict atrocities on Dalits with impunity? The answer he himself gave was that they were weak. They lacked all the strengths: the strength of numbers, strength of finance, and strength of spirit. They were a minority in every village and thus they lacked the strength of numbers. It was obvious that they did not have any financial strength. But having internalized their inferior status in the society for a long time, they were completely sapped of even the spiritual strength. In contrast, he offered the example of Muslims in India, who also were numerical minority in most parts but no Hindu dared to raise hand on any of them. Because they knew if they did it, the entire Muslim community from Kashmir to Kanyakumari would rush in support of the victim. According to him the solution therefore lay in overcoming their weakness and the way to accomplish it was by merging with some existing religious community. The existing religious communities that existed in India with significant strength were Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs. Since he had always invoked example of the Muslim community with admiration, Islam appeared to many as his imminent choice. But when he actually implemented



his vow in 1956, it was Buddhism, which did not have an existing community in India.

The main thrust of Dr Ambedkar after 1935 has been on securing rights for Dalits through politics. While doing so, he was not a wee bit sectarian. Dalits were targeted not merely because they were his own people, but because they comprised the lowliest of the lowly. Society in a systems view could be as strong as its weakest link and hence it was imperative for anyone aiming at the development of Indian society to focus his/her attention on Dalits. In fact his vision was not even bounded by national consideration; it went far beyond in imagining a human society based on the principle of liberty, equality and fraternity. Since it was known to the world that this principle emerged from the French Revolution, imbued with bourgeois aspiration, he insisted that he had taken it from Buddhism. His insistence was to have harmonious balance between these three aspects, which was not indicated by the French revolution. It was the vision of an ideal society, a veritable utopia, characterized by all those ideals in fullest measure. The real import of his ideology lay in this and not in what he did as expedient measures in those turbulent times.

In India, it is not easy to transcend caste identity, especially if you are a Dalit. Even though Dr Ambedkar had never practiced caste politics, he was identified as a caste leader. It may be appropriate just to recall his advent into politics to appreciate this point. As the British promulgated the India Act 1935, according to which it was decided to hold elections for provincial assemblies, Dr Ambedkar launched his first political party, the Independent Labour Party (ILP) in 1936. He declared it to be the workers' party. It may be noted that this was the first left party of India, the Communist Party although founded in 1920, having operated clandestinely and then existed as a part of the socialist block of the Congress party. The historical importance of this party lies in the fact that it has for the first time demonstrated on the roads of Konkan (One of the most backward and hence caste ridden region of the present Maharashtra State) and Mumbai how a

struggle can be articulated combining class and caste issues. The most obnoxious duality of caste and class, the communists created with their Brahmanist approach has been the main obstacle in radical politics today in India.

In 1942, because of the Cripps Mission report, which had met most demands of all communal parties but completely ignored the class based ILP, Dr Ambedkar had to dissolve the ILP and form a caste based party - the Scheduled Caste Federation (SCF). Almost at the same time he was inducted into the viceroy's executive council. Even during the SCF phase, his politics often transcended the caste boundaries. When the viceroy's council was dissolved in 1946, he found himself utterly excluded in the political parleys for the transfer of power. He was desperately aimed at entering the Constituent Assembly, which was to shape up the future of India. But there was no possibility of his getting elected to it. In such a situation, he prepared a memorandum on behalf of the SCF to the Constituent Assembly in 1946, proposing hardcoding the structure of state socialism into the Constitution of India. It was here that the Muslim League with the mediation of Jogendranath Mandal, the SCF leader, got him elected from East Bengal. After 1947, due to the partition, his membership expired and the Congress strategists got him elected from Bombay. He was made the chairman of the most important of its committees, the drafting committee. But interestingly, the radical agenda of state socialism, which he was so keen to be made as the basic structure of the Constitution even was not mentioned before the Constituent Assembly. Just to recall the contents of the 'States and Minorities', the title with which this memorandum was published, were so radical that if there had been a socialist revolution in India, the post revolutionary structure of the society would have not been much different than what it proposed.

Nonetheless, he could manage to incorporate comprehensive measures in favour of the oppressed sections of the society, viz., Dalits and tribals in the Constitution. They comprised protective measures, mainly the legal provisions stressing equality, abolishing

the practice of untouchability and punitive provisions for transgressing those; affirmative measures in their favour in politics, education and public employment, popularly known as reservations; and the developmental measures such as many targeted schemes which would progressively bring them on par with the rest. The extension of latter has manifested from 1979 into instituting the Scheduled Caste Sub Plan (SCSP), which mandates provision of the budget in proportion equivalent to the ratio of population of Dalits to the total population to be used exclusively for the development of the Scheduled Castes. Although like any other thing, this scheme, which has been in operation in 27 states and union territories, also suffers in implementation, the positive aspect of it is that the percentage allocation has been consistently rising over the recent years: In 2004-05 the allocation of 11.06 percent had gone up to 12.05 percent in 2005-06, to 14.11 percent in 2006-07 and to 14.80 percent in 2007-08 against the mandated over 16 percent.

Indian Constitution in this regard may appear to be the beacon of social justice for the entire world. However, Ambedkar during his life time itself saw what would happen of the Constitution in practice. In his enthusiasm when the Constitution was adopted, he had advised his followers that they could shun agitational politics and adopt the constitutional methods to secure their demands. But soon he was disillusioned with the Constitution itself and variously disowned it. He famously said that although they built a beautiful temple (Constitution), before they could install gods, devils have occupied it.

Notwithstanding the implementation deficit, the Constitution has still accomplished a good deal of gain for the oppressed communities. There is no sphere and no echelon today where Dalits are not to be found. There have been president, chief justice, chief ministers, secretaries, CEOs, and scores of people in academics, frontier technologies, and professions in India. The political nexus through which huge political tribute from the ruling classes flows also have enriched a sizable political class of Dalits. And through combination of these processes, some Dalits have entered business to inspire some

misinformed Dalits to coin the terms like dalit bourgeois or dalit capitalism. Taken all of these together, along with their family members, the number of upwardly mobile Dalits do not however exceed 10 percent. The 90 percent population of Dalits still languishes in villages and suffers from all kinds of discrimination and oppression. Although it may not be visible in the urban settings, the caste system operates as a system of premium and discounts and can well thrive in the most modern corporate establishments of in India.

There is a notion, carried through Dr Ambedkar's analysis that the caste system is sourced from the Hindu religion. This notion has misled much of the Dalit movement. The modern developmental paradigm in India has probably become the major prop of the castes than religion. For example, the Shudra Castes, which used to be clubbed with the Untouchables in earlier phases of the non-Brahman struggle, have become the main tormentors of Dalits in villages. The ritualistic castes have been weakening under the thrust of capitalist development and have almost transformed the caste system to be the divide between Dalits and non-Dalits. This divide is as much rooted in the traditional prejudices as it is in the dynamics of India's modern institution. I have explained this dynamics of political economy in my book – *The Persistence of Caste*, which may be available in Pakistan. To continue with the stereotype treating Hindu religion as the sole culprit would be like whipping the dead snake and letting the real snakes to sneak past.

The caste system has been a dynamic system, which has been evolving either to mould the situation to its requirements or to mould itself if the former was not possible. Therefore to search its root is methodologically futile exercise and one should rather focus on its contemporary manifestation. The contemporary caste system manifests itself through the incidence of atrocities. In India, these atrocities are neatly tabulated by an organization of the government of India, National Crime Research Bureau, which publishes its reports annually, accessible to all. (see its website [ncrb.org](http://ncrb.org)). Going by this proxy for caste, the caste system appeared weakening through

the decades of 1970s through 1980s. But from the adoption of the neoliberal economic reforms by the government, the trend has reversed. I had analyzed the time series data on atrocities and found that the post-reform period presents a clear secular increasing trend in atrocity numbers. Just taking two major categories of crime, viz., murder and rape, we can see this trend. During the decade of 1981 to 1990, the annual average of the number of murders of Dalits was 535, which went up to 546 during the 1991-2000 and rose further to 681 during the next five years, i.e., 2001-2005. The corresponding figures for the rape of Dalit women are 714, 992 and 1213. Although these figures are not normalized for the population increase, nobody will fail to note their significance. Insofar as atrocities are the product of the power asymmetry between Dalits and non-Dalits in villages, it is clear that neoliberal policies have been accentuating this asymmetry. These policies have unleashed various crises on Dalits and their condition has been certainly worsening fast vis-à-vis others.

Lastly, I would like to again congratulate Sir Ganga Ram Heritage Foundation for taking this initiative to set up a dialogue between the South Asian activists-scholars who have been working for the annihilation of the caste system in their respective countries. It is a reflection that the caste system is a pan South Asian problem and not confined to India alone. There is strong pride in Pakistan that there is no caste system followed here. They reason out that Islam does not permit any caste system. While it is very true of Islam, there should be appreciation that practice does not necessarily confirm to the ideals. You may know that even the same argument is proffered by the right-wing Hindus that caste system in its evil form is not a part of Hinduism and they coolly attribute it to the outside aggressors, particularly the Muslims and the machinations of the colonialists. The delusion into believing that caste system is not our problem, effectively shuts us from seeing the problem. This attitude has already allowed the condition of Dalits in Pakistan to worsen. It is not only the miniscule minority of Ranas (the feudal Hindu landlords), that oppress Dalits, it is also the Muslim feudality which treats them no

better. When Pakistan came into existence, the Quaid-e-Azam Jinnha had assured the Dalits and other minorities that they would be given much better treatment than that in India. After the Scheduled caste Declaration Act of 1957, Dalits were given reservations of 6 percent. These reservations have been transformed into minority reservations in 1997 by the Nawaz Sharif government, resulting into strengthening the already exploitative elements in the minority community. If I may remind you, there are more than 50 organizations working for the interests of Dalits in Pakistan and they have organized themselves into Pakistan Dalit Solidarity Network. They have put forth their demand, which I think read very reasonable. For instance they demand caste wise census; reserved seats for themselves in Parliament, and provincial assemblies; setting up a national commission for the SCs; allotment of land to the landless; and some protective measures. Now such measures being extant in India for 166 million Dalits, why should Pakistan be hesitant in extending them to its 2.5 million Dalits. I would urge the Pakistan government through the minister sahib Sardar Ali Khosa, the chairman of this seminar, to consider them favourably. I would go further and say that since the size of the problem is small, 2.5 million as against India's 166 million, Pakistan should take due steps to demonstrate to the world that they have effectively annihilated the caste system. It would prove to be the great motivator for other countries to follow suit.

I would like to end with a hope that this initiative will flourish into a better coordination between the activists and accelerate the pace of annihilation of castes. That will be the best tribute to Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar and also to Sir Ganga Ram. Thank you.

# Understanding Existential Castes Through Atrocity Metrics

14 November, 2009

I make following five propositions:

- The classical caste system depicted by the four varna structure is almost dead in India .
- The existent caste system in India is concentrated at the lowest edge of the caste framework marking the division of caste and non-caste people.
- While in urban areas the caste system operates as a system of premium and discounts, its most insidious expression in the vast countryside is caste atrocities.
- Caste atrocities are the best proxy measure of the operational casteism and provide meaningful metrics to understand its contemporary form and content. Ending them would effectively end the remaining castes.
- Any attempt to present castes in a more complex manner amounts to obfuscate their essential feature and only serves the interests of the ruling classes.

Despite huge scholarly interest in castes since colonial times and long history of anti-caste struggle, the discourse on caste still runs in a stereotypical manner, taking them as amorphous continuum of hierarchy, which is sourced from the Hindu dharmashastras. There is a kind of romantic delight in amplifying the prowess of this vile institution as defying the expectations of many, including the likes of Marx, who expected that it would crumble under the onslaught of capitalism and the forces of modernity.

The problem with this kind of understanding of castes is that it is utterly useless in dealing with them excepting perhaps for academic accomplishments and political opportunism. Firstly, such an amorphous continuum is not amenable to break into the neat contending camps with antagonistic contradictions, the resolution of which could be termed as resolution of caste issue. Secondly, since this continuum is supposed to exist with the religious authority of Hinduism, one is misled to infer that unless Hinduism is destroyed, castes may not be annihilated. Thirdly, the continuum, with its inevitable fluidity in holding innumerable castes in hierarchy entails endless contention between them and imparts it a kind of self-regulative perpetuity. And fourthly, in dealing with them it impels people towards directionless 'social engineering' rather than aiming at revolutionary change that this kind of deep rooted venom requires.

Castes are essentially hierarchy-seeking and hence pervasively divisive. They cut across classes, tend to germinate reactionary consciousness and hence cannot be used for articulating any radical struggle. It is not to say that the caste struggles that have taken place during the last century did not have radical content. They indeed were waged with radical vision and even accomplished a significant change in the lives of India 's shudras and ati-shudras, the worst victims of castes. However, down the line, they entailed rejuvenation of caste consciousness and enlivening of caste identities, totally antithetical development as far as their avowed objective of annihilation of castes was concerned.

In my analysis the main reason for this paradoxical result lay in their lack of grasp of the essence of castes to begin with and the failure to keep pace with their subsequent developments.

If we see through the brief history of encounters with castes, we get varied conceptions of castes depending upon the intent of the definer:

Colonial rulers saw castes with their divisive potential and promoted their conceptualisation in a manner in which India appeared sans civil



society and as a bunch of communities warring among themselves. Towards this object, they built up huge information base through district gazetteers from 1869, decennial census from 1871, provincial statistics (1875) and encyclopaedic castes and tribes survey (1891) that reinforced divisive consciousness among people. Anti-Brahmin movement took castes as the contrivance of the outsider Aryan conquerors, the ancestors of the present day Brahmans, for enslaving native people and therefore targeted Brahmins and sought to discard their customs and traditions. Dalit movement, particularly under Dr. Ambedkar, while rejecting the racial theory of castes propounded by the non-Brahmin movement and identifying the enemy in Brahmanism, distinct from Brahman caste, along with capitalism as the contemporary exploitative system, however came to the conclusion with regard to castes that they were an integral part of the Hindu religio-cultural structure and proposed renouncement of Hinduism to escape the caste bondage. For the Communists castes were just a feudal relic, a part of the superstructure, which would automatically vanish when the economic base is changed through revolution. The contemporary Bahujanwadis (and its offshoots such as Mulanivasis) look at castes as an asset to mobilise the oppressed masses into a constituency of 85% to vanquish the 15% upper castes.

All of these conceptualizations reflect varied degree of theoretical confusion and miss out the essential character of castes. As a result, while the non-brahmin movement and Dalit movement succeeded in some degree in challenging the upper caste rule and alleviating caste sufferings of the oppressed castes, they could not eliminate them altogether. Castes have not only survived but have also grown in their oppressive content.

Contrary to commonplace notion castes have been changing all through history. One can easily note momentous changes in them during colonial period, brought about by the imperatives of colonial rule. The socio-cultural milieu of pre-colonial India principally shaped by the family and kinship institutions that conditioned minds with a religious and caste identity was severally impacted by the

influx of western liberalism, colonial culture and ideology. The early reforms initiated by Warren Hastings, who was sent as the first governor general of India by the British Crown in terms of Regulating Act of 1773, such as instituting private ownership of land and codification of Hindu and Muslim laws according to their respective scriptures, had vastly strengthened the upper castes. Integration of India into a single politico-administrative unit and consequently institution of a civil service, army, judiciary, etc. variously impacted the socio-economic structure of the Indian society. Implementation of uniform criminal law significantly weakened the caste panchayats. Besides these and such other administrative changes, the advent of capitalism during colonial times wrought significant changes in the caste system.

It is true that unlike Europe capitalism in India did not have to contend with feudalism; rather it saw feudalism as an important ally in its supply chain. What however should be noted is that the upper castes, mainly banias and Brahmins, from which the early capitalist class (entrepreneurs and managers) emerged, largely lost the ritual sense of hierarchy among them, which was characteristic of castes. The capitalist culture certainly had a debilitating impact on the caste culture and traditions of these communities leading to obliteration of ritual notion of caste and promotion of social osmosis among them. The capitalist class comprising entrepreneurs and managers belonging to banias and Brahmins, and other business communities like Parsis, Khojas and Bohras, largely overcome the classical caste hierarchy and came closer as a class. They would however promote caste divide among the lower castes, to keep their feudal allies in supply chain pleased and to discipline the working class in their own establishments with its fatalistic ideology and divisive ethos.

After independence, the bourgeois landlord state that came into being in India adopted the modernist constitution. The constitution created an elaborate structure of protective and development measures for the dalits and tribals, the people technically outside the purview of the caste system. The state settled for modernization because the

feudal classes also saw prospects for their advancement through it. The Nehruvian modernist Project, significantly comprising Land Reforms and Green Revolution, immensely enriched the traditional farming shudra castes firstly by making them owners of land and thereafter bringing them huge productivity gains. The erstwhile upper caste landlords shifted to the urban areas leaving the villages under the lordship of the shudra rich farmers. With their economic empowerment coupled with their numerical strength achieved by consolidating all the middle-band shudra castes, they soon became an important element in the political sphere.

In the context of castes, Green Revolution brought in capitalist relations in the countryside through development of cash economy and markets for agricultural inputs/ outputs and credit. On the positive side for dalits, it broke the backbone of the *balutedari* system but on the negative side, it abolished many of their traditional vocations. Without any alternative means of livelihood, the dalits were increasingly pushed to work on the shudra farms as landless labourers. In absence of the traditional upper castes in villages, the baton of Brahmanism was wielded by the neo-rich shudra castes sans cultural sophistry of the former. They expected dalits to pay them obeisance as they did to the upper castes in yesteryears. However, the consciousness gained by dalits through their movement conflicted with this expectation and contributed to building up grudge against them, which could precipitate into atrocity with slightest provocation.

The shudra castes today dominate the political establishment of the entire country and are fast coming up in entrepreneurship too. Although the vaishyas and Brahmins may be very visible as leading the capitalist establishment because of their first movers' advantage, the shudra castes are fast catching up. The Gounders in Tamilnadu, a traditional farming caste, creating a world's biggest knitwear industry in Thirupur or the Nadars dominating the fire cracker industry in Shivkasi and dominating the transportation industry, or Marathas in Maharashtra controlling the sugar cooperatives and education sectors

or Patels in Gujarat becoming big businessmen and industrialists are just a few examples. With their advancement in the economic and political scale the ritual status of the shudra castes as a classical inferior caste group has almost vanished.

The rise of the shudras has led to the emergence of regional political parties by 1970s, which made politics fiercely competitive and impelled parties to increasingly make use of caste and communal identities. It culminated into formation of the first coalition government at the centre in 1977 which changed the complexion of politics permanently thereafter. The very discourse on backwardness of the backward castes, reflected by Mandal Commission also is a product of this process. This discourse could be clearly seen as responsible for opening the floodgates of caste identities in the name of backwardness. It is not that there are no poor or backwards among the shudras. India where 78 percent people subsist on the earning of about 40 cents a day and suffer various deprivations is naturally fraught only with poor and backward people strewn across the castes and communities. Caste however is not about secular poverty and backwardness; it is about the socio-cultural, quasi-racial prejudice against certain people.

Thus, there is no socio-cultural prejudice among the castes within the formal caste system. If there is not enough intercaste transaction among them, it is partly because of the cultural drag and partly for the class difference. The caste prejudice however exists only against dalits. The existent caste system therefore reduces to the divide between dalits and non-dalits. While it is pervasively experienced by dalits, its most menacing manifestation is seen in the form of atrocities on dalits in rural areas.

The empowerment of the shudra castes and relative disempowerment of dalits in countryside coupled with the latter's cultural assertion has been responsible for caste clashes and caste atrocities. While dalits were always wronged, the phenomenon of caste atrocities could be marked by the increased power asymmetry between dalits and

shudras in villages by the late 1960s. One of the first grave atrocities took place on 25 December 1968 in Keezhavenmani in old Thanjavur district in which 44 dalits, mostly women and children were massacred by the landlords and their henchmen. It was followed by spate of atrocities all over the country. Initially, as even in Keezhavenmani, the atrocities came as a consequence of class struggle waged by the communist parties, firstly the parliamentary parties and later the naxalites. After Keezhavenmani, it was Purnia in Bihar which saw the first caste massacre in 1969. Then there were spate of killings all over Bihar over three decades. It only stopped when Dalits began to retaliate with the help of naxalites by the late 1990s.

Atrocities mirror the intricacies of social dynamics vis-à-vis caste. As for instance there has been a qualitative difference between atrocities earlier and now. Earlier, atrocities were committed as a routine with an assumption of absolute right over Dalits, with no sense of wrongdoing. Now atrocities are committed with a sense of loss of that right, with a sense of being wronged. Earlier, atrocities were committed in arrogance as Dalits would not speak out; now they are committed in vengeance against Dalit assertion. Earlier, atrocities were the manifestation of contempt for Dalits, today they are the manifestation of resentment against the privileges Dalits get from the state.

There has also been a difference between the nature of atrocities earlier and now. Earlier, they were committed as an integrated part of the interaction between Dalits and non-Dalits and hence tended to be casual, more of humiliating in nature than of physically damaging. Today, they are far more violent and are in nature of vengeance or punishment. They are therefore not only humiliating but also physically destructive; far more brutal than before. Earlier, atrocities were mostly committed by individuals, in a huff of rage. Now they are committed collectively, somewhat in a planned manner, in a mode of demonstrative justice; teaching a lesson to the entire community. The increasing number of atrocities against Dalits in

recent years has been alarming enough but this change in their intensity also is noteworthy.

Atrocities, data on which incidentally are maintained by the government, can serve as the best proxy measure for the existent casteism. The intensity of atrocities, the area in which they take place, their frequency, their time series growth and even the data on the subsequent process of justice delivery system provide good metrics to understand castes and caste dynamics and for strategizing combat against them. Many a myth gets exploded in their wake. For instance, the myth that only the upper (brahmanical) castes are the oppressor of dalits and in corollary the shudra (backward) castes are their allies; the myth that economic development dampen castes, the myth that the caste atrocities are the correlate of feudal economy, the myth of representation logic dearly upheld by Dalits that if their caste-men are represented in administration, the latter would take care of their interests; the myth that atrocities are committed only on the weakest of dalits, the myth that there exists a vibrant anti-caste Dalit movement that is vigilant about the dalit interests, the myth that the formal political opposition represents contradiction among the ruling classes (castes) and which helps dalits in fighting their oppression, the myth that political action of dalits is leader-centric, the myth about the independence of judiciary and impartial media; the myth that there exists a sizable progressive civil society, which is against casteism and the greatest myth of state being the friend of Dalits or at least impartial mediator between Dalits and others, had all crumbled at Khairlanji, as variously in other atrocity cases. It held out mirror before us and showed us what needs to be done. All atrocities unambiguously exposed that casteism is no more confined to civil society; it is well supported by the state apparatus, implying thereby that the anti-caste forces necessarily have to deal with the state too.

Given the obscure origins and the resilience of the caste system, the viable strategy for combating caste could be seen in curbing its manifestation. In contemporary times, atrocities being the most dominant manifestation of castes, the strategic focus should be to

arrest atrocities. As seen before, the root cause for atrocities is the growing power asymmetry between dalits and non-dalits in villages. It may be interesting to recall that more than seven decades ago Dr. Ambedkar, while explaining the rationale behind his declaration to renounce Hinduism to his vanguard activists in 1936 had exclusively focused on the issue of atrocities and diagnosed exactly the same thing. He proposed the solution in terms of supplementing dalit-strength by merging dalit community with some existing religious community through mass conversion. Although his religious conversion in 1956 did not confirm to this prescription, the futility of communitarian solution or religious conversion is not difficult to see. In the then communally charged atmosphere, it might have been thinkable to speak in terms of communitarian solution, but today when the classes have sprouted out of the bellies of each caste, they would be utterly useless. The power asymmetry between dalits and non-dalits can be effectively overcome only by their class unity with others, transcending the caste idiom. While it may appear as the distant dream to many today for historical and other reasons, it is the only effective solution to the caste problem worth pursuing. The initiative in this respect shall have to be taken by the Left forces. The beginning can always be made if they join dalits with ideological clarity in retaliating atrocities. As the experience in Tsundur and the Gaya-Aurangabad belt indicated, retaliation is the only effective way of curbing the atrocities and in turn castes. The shockwave created through it can not only deter the perpetrators of crime but also detach the oppressed masses of the shudra castes from them. The same can also impel desired cultural change and accelerate class unity of the oppressed masses across castes.

Contrary to commonplace view, the problem of castes has become much simpler today than ever before. The existential castes are confined to a divide between dalits and non-dalits, quite like the racial divide between blacks and white or the class division between capitalists and proletariat. No time in history, castes rendered themselves as easy for combating against as they do now. The

historical project of annihilation of castes is accomplishable now, provided the forces swearing by it are ready to act.



# The Real Issue, A Surreal Solution

09 May, 2011

India scarcely may have had such a momentous month. In quick succession to the “India on top of the world” euphoria created by the World Cup win came the “India Wins War against Corruption”, brought to us by 73 years old Gandhian crusader from Ralegaon Siddhi, Anna Hazare and of course his soul mates. His 98 hours fast unto death at Jantar Mantar in Delhi to demand a civil society participation in drafting the Jan Lokpal bill made the government crawl into accepting all his demands. More than the win, the manner in which this fast enthused and galvanized young people across the country in idealistic fervor was indeed encouraging. It was the first time in two decades that anyone had been able to mobilize support on the issue of corruption on such a large scale. Indeed, the mobilization of nationwide opinion against ‘scam a day’ kind of corruption is a great feat this episode accomplished, but to think of it as a solution, actual or potential, is rather trivializing the issue. And if it was not to be a solution, one must look into whys and whyfores of this remarkable presentation.

## Not What Meets the Eye

The Lokpal Bill is based on the concept of Ombudsman in western democracies, who oversees the conduct of public servants. The first draft of the bill was presented in 1969 and was even passed by the Lok Sabha. However, by the time it reached Rajya Sabha, the Lok Sabha was dissolved. Thereafter it was presented in 1971, 1977, 1985, 1989, 1996, 2001, 2005 and 2008 by various governments but remained unpassed for some or the other reason. There was thus an agreement on having a Lokpal in the political class. The current UPA had promised in its election manifesto to implement it. The bill was accordingly put up before the national consultative committee formed under the chairmanship of Sonia Gandhi. Meanwhile there has been pressure from various civil society groups for including their

representatives in the drafting committee along with politicians. It had its effect; the working committee on transparency, responsibility and control had decided on 26 February to review the bill and in its meeting on 4 April had consultations with the representatives from the civil society under the leadership of Aruna Roy. It had discussions on the drafts prepared by the civil society groups and reached agreements on many a point, others being slated for further review. After this the next meeting was scheduled on 28 April. In this context, the sudden decision of Anna Hazare to go on an indefinite fast smacks of something else being behind the entire episode.

What is that something may not be easily known. But the way the fast happened, the manner it was hyped and was concluded within just four days had something unusual to it. It may be surmised from what it accomplished and for whom. Before the fast the scams getting exposed in rapid succession had dipped the credibility of the UPA government to an all time low. Its usual boast about economic management was also not working; inflation being out of bound, manufacturing showing up sharp decline and the economic growth being re-estimated downward. The situation was pregnant with something big, the peoples' protests in African and Middle East being the ongoing inspiration. In such a situation, while the government would love to have a throttled protest erupt; the opposition, not being in position to directly mobilize masses because of skeletons in their own cupboards, could be satisfied with a proxy win of the kind the fast achieved. Nothing substantial has happened which would not have happened otherwise. The scam exposing by the media has suddenly stopped. The attention of the public is effectively deflected to the parleys of the joint drafting committee for the bill. There appears not much disagreement over the drafts now. The government has scored that it would bring in an effective anti-corruption mechanism as people wanted. The opposition revelled that the government was kneeled down on the corruption issue. Anna Hazare became instant Mahatma and others became the heroes in the 'second

battle of freedom'. Who appears to have lost is people; people of India as in 1947.

### **Megashow of Media**

The manner in which this protest was orchestrated in the electronic media should certainly create suspicion whether all this was not preplanned even after conceding that the media desperately needed some TRP-raising blockbuster between the world cup and the IPL. Media went far beyond its usual hyperboles and spread white lies that it was the biggest people's upsurge in post-independence period. Leave apart the countrywide anti-corruption movements led by Jaiprakash Narayan and VP Singh, Jantar Mantar itself has witnessed far bigger rallies than the crowds collected around Hazare. But nobody ever took their note. No scribe ever reached or a TV camera cared to focus on when thousands of tribals gathered there demanding the implementation of the forest act. The media that made mahatma of Hazare has systematically ignored another Gandhian Irom Sharmila, who has been on fast from 4 November 2000 for the just and concrete demand of annulment of Arms Forces Special Powers Act that has turned Manipur and other NE states as virtual military cantonments. Indeed it was essentially a media show; proving its prowess that it can make or unmake the world for us.

Media's prowess in shaping public opinion and their movements was noted long back by Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky in their 'Manufacturing Consent'. The flood of news channels and cyber media has precisely done this in manufacturing this movement of the middle classes and facebook generation. Their collective dissent however is explained by Michel Chossudovsky in his 'Manufacturing Dissent' as the necessity of corporate houses and elite class to maintain the voice of dissent as a part of the system at a level where it does not become a threat to the latter. The system thus needs Hazares for its own legitimacy. It was not for nothing that the corporate bigwigs like Rahul Bajaj, Adi Godrej, Pawan Goenka, Sunil Munjal, and FICCI's Rajeev Kumar and Assocham's Dilip Modi among many

others had rushed in support of Hazare at Jantar Mantar. Not just the moral support, they actually funded the show. As per the Times of India (14 April) Jindal Aluminum contributed Rs 25 lakh; Surinder Pal Singh, Rs 10 lakh; Ramki, Rs 5 lakh; Good Earth Trust of Eisher, Rs 3 lakh; Duggal, Rs. 3 lakh; HDFC Bank, Rs 50,000. Out of the total sum of Rs 82.88 lakh collected, Rs 46.50 lakh (56.10 percent) has come from the capitalists.

### **The MBA Revolution**

It was astounding to see how an elementary educated Gandhian could appeal to our wi fi generation in cities, mostly belonging to MBA types to come spiritedly on their mailer groups and social networks. This is the generation that is elated by the progress made by neoliberal India in terms of GDP growth, its imminent demographic dividend and dream of India becoming a super power. They cannot see this inspiring India's image being sullied by the strings of cases of corruption by politicians and their accomplices in bureaucracy. They already disdain politics as it is associated with the underclass who cast their votes on the basis of caste, community or bribes in the form of cash and booze. They would rather do away this universal franchise business and bring in the corporate model for the governance of the country. After all, it is they, the corporate people, who have brought the country to the current glory from the ignominy of nearly three decades signified by the hindu rate of growth. Fed on the superficial course on socio-political environment as a complement to their main course on business strategy, they would be least expected to know that it was always the corporate-politician joint venture at the saddle in policy making that produced the hindu rate of growth of yesteryears or the near double digit growth of recent years. People of this country barely figured in their game.

### **Confronting Corruption**

The entire tenor of the discourse has been as though the corruption was confined only to the bureaucrats and politicians. The capitalists,

who actually oiled the greed of these people and promoted corruption, the people from film industry, which primarily runs on black money, the babas who amassed massive wealth with a camouflage of donations of ordinary people, 78 percent of whom are supposed to be living off Rs 20 a day, including some politicians were seen among the supporters of Hazare. Naturally, there was not a single word spoken against them. With a backdrop of Bharatmata, as found in the RSS publications, the context of support from various RSS functionaries, Hazare's praise for Modi, the entire show wore a thick tinge of Hindutva. The placards of 'remove reservations' were part of the show till end. Actually, corruption as rent giving/seeking has been an integral part of the hindu social order, which sanctioned differential statuses to people and commensurate rent. The implantation of capitalism on the base of caste feudalism made corruption as a part of the accumulation process. But the corruption of the kind we encounter today is the product of neoliberal policies of the government. It opened up flood gates for rent seeking in disposing of 'public' in favour of private. Its social Darwinist ethos that celebrates accumulation of wealth by private individuals as a virtue and reflection of entrepreneurship and innovation has been the real fillip to corruption. Actually, corruption becomes the legitimate return for entrepreneurship, economic or political, for neoliberals, which is why neoliberals like Manmohan Singh remain unmoved by the clamour over it. No one heard a word against these policies in the Hazare show.

There is no doubt that the Lokpal as wanted by the 'civil society' will be installed soon. Only naïve can think that he will be able to scratch corruption. It would be one more institution added to a plethora of them, which itself could be prone to add to the existing problems as the syndromes of 'Thomases and Balakrishnans' indicate. However, it will certainly create an illusion of having the institutional solution in place. When the rising indignation of people could rapidly shape radical politics, which can only arrest corruption through the structural overhaul of the system, it will confuse them into believing

that the solution can come from within the existing one. Indeed, the surreal solution the Hazare show offered to the problem of corruption will surely fool people as many time before.

# From The Underbelly Of *Swarnim* Gujarat

07 April, 2011

Nobody noticed little vibrations on the literal margins of vibrant Gujarat on 24 January 2011 but potentially they could cause significant tremors across the country. In a nondescript village of Joradiary in Vav taluka of Banaskantha district in North Gujarat, practically on the borders of Rajasthan and Pakistan, a procession of 200 odd Dalits accompanied by beats of drum and slogans of “long live Ambedkar” marched into a farm under illegal control of a Rabari to restore its possession to a Dalit. The Ahmedabad based Council for Social Justice (CSJ), who led this struggle to its culmination was justifiably apprehensive of the beneficiaries daring their upper caste tormentors in taking this bold step and had therefore strategized to collect Dalits from all villages in taluka at Vav for a public meeting before taking the victory march. Indeed, the beneficiary Dalit family, the *de jure* owner of the farm for last 28 years, literally trembled to do a little ritual, to mark the taking of its *de facto* possession. More such take-overs followed until evening to embolden people to take possession of their own lands, being illegally cultivated by the upper castes. In the Vav taluka itself 35 Dalit families would be benefitted by the ownership of over 150 acres.

Unknown even to Dalits, it was a landmark event that could be verily likened to the one that took place in Mahad on 20 March 1927 when the delegates to the Bahishkrit Conference there had marched under the leadership of their new found leader Dr Ambedkar to the chavadar tank and asserted their civil rights to use its water.

## Caste Residue of Land Reforms

At the time of transfer of power in 1947, the land ownership was virtually concentrated in the hands of a few landlords, who were erstwhile feudal lords. The ethos of the freedom struggle led the new rulers to announce the policies like abolition of Zamindari and

redistribution of surplus land to tillers. It had salutary impact in calming and confusing radical peasant movements that demanded land reforms. The glorious Telangana struggle, for instance, was called off by the communists precisely because of these policy announcements, pushing them onto the parliamentary path that would never reach their cherished goal of revolution. Land reforms did take place but in a calibrated and truncated manner. Some amount of land was taken from the upper caste feudal lords and distributed among the middle caste tenants. No one fully comprehended the far reaching consequences of this innocuous development, which would change the basic complexion of rural India. The capitalist strategy of Green Revolution immediately following it brought in huge enrichment to these middle castes, which leveraged it to hegemonize most spheres of national life.

Speaking of Gujarat, UN Dhebar, the chief minister of the then Saurashtra state had enacted the Saurashtra Land Reforms Act, 1952, giving occupancy rights to 55000 tenant cultivators over 12 lakh acres of land, out of 29 lakh acres held by *Girasdars*, spread over 1726 villages, the balance being left for their personal cultivation. Girasdars were mainly upper caste Kshatriya, known as *Darbars*, literally meaning rulers. Tenant cultivators were mainly Patels by caste, who became the owners of this land. The Patels enriched them by undertaking massive cash crop cultivation like groundnut, cotton, cumin and later graduating to set up cotton ginning, oil mills, and other industries. This has been the evolution of the Saurashtra Patel lobby, euphemistically known as *Telia Rajas* (oil kings), who came to occupy the dominant position in the politics of Gujarat. With their social capital and state backing, they went on acquiring huge tracts of agricultural lands all over the state but most notably in the tribal belt of south Gujarat. Laws were suitably amended to facilitate this acquisition. Two of the most notable changes in Law were: 1. taking away 8 km limit for an agriculturist to own agricultural land from his residence thereby allowing absentee landlordism and 2. changing the order of priorities from ST, SC and



OBC to original landlords and then others for the right to cultivate government surplus land.

Through the other Act, (Estate Acquisition Act), the government acquired 'uncultivable' and cultivable wasteland, *gochar* land (village grassland for cattle grazing) and other assets by compensating Girasdars. The huge land that came in possession of the state became theatre of the land grab struggle in early 1960s by Dalit landless peasants and agricultural laborers, under the leadership of Dalit textile workers of Ahmedabad. In the words of Mr. Somchandbhai Makwana, an influential leader of that movement, estimated 2 lakh acres of land was grabbed by Dalits and other backward castes, which still remains in their possession, albeit without regularization by the government.

In many cases Dalit and OBC peasants and/or their co-operatives, tilling lands under the government's *ek-sali* (one year renewable tenure) scheme for several decades, were evicted and the land was reverted back to the 'original' upper caste landlords. Gandhinagar, the capital of Gujarat, has been a meek witness since last three years to many Dalit families (mostly from Saurashtra) offering satyagrahas on the footpath near the Assembly against this intrigue. The amendments to the Acts referred to above emboldened the upper castes and the state machinery to violently evict Dalits from land they have cultivated for decades. This had manifested into a macabre incident on 27 November 1999 in Pankhan village in Saurashtra, in which a mob of 800 upper caste men had attacked Dalits with swords, spears, pipes and fire arms and seriously injured 60 men and women and effectively evicted them from 125 acres of land.

### **A Strange Struggle for Land**

In 1997, *santh* (title) orders were given for a total of 150 acres to 40 Dalits of Bharad village in Dhrangadhra taluka of Surendranagar district. Two of these 40, Devjibhai and Kanabhai (a blind agricultural labourer) asked the upper caste Patel to vacate the land

allotted to them. Upper caste landlords responded with violence but were met with serious resistance. Violent group clashes ensued and in one such six persons suffered serious injuries. Dalits endured severe social boycott by the upper castes. Devjibhai was apprehended and imprisoned under PASA (Prevention of Anti-Social Activities Act) for daring to enter the land although he was its de jure owner. It was at this stage that the CSJ stepped in. CSJ creatively combined legal and agitational strategies and got Devjibhai released. It organized “Ambedkar Rath” through 28 villages over seven days to mobilize Dalit support, which culminated into a massive rally of over 10000 landless Dalits on 6 December 1999, the death anniversary of Dr Ambedkar. The struggle encompassed all 12438 acres of prime agricultural land declared surplus vide the Agriculture Land Ceiling Act, for which 2398 Dalit families and 50 tribal families were given the santh before 3 to 10 years, but not the actual possession. The land, apart from being very fertile, was potentially valuable because Surendranagar district was to be the biggest beneficiary of the Narmada irrigation scheme.

A parallel struggle was articulated in another village Kaundh, where a young textile mill worker Dungarshibhai of Ahmedabad gave up his job to take cudgels for his people in village. In defiance of one of the biggest and tyrant Darbars in the district, who owned nearly 3000 acres of land, he drove the tractor on the land given to his family in santh but which still was in possession of the Darbar. As the entire dalits stood behind him, the Darbar allowed Dungarshibhai to cultivate but took away the crop. CSJ filed a criminal complaint and put three Darbars behind bars. Dungarshibhai today is revered as an unchallenged Dalit leader in the Surendranagar district.

These struggles were strange as they were waged by the de jure owners of land for its possession from the illegal holders. While the government eagerly publicized distribution of lands to the SC/ST beneficiaries, it intentionally or otherwise ignored their physical handing over. The process for handing over physical possession involved village talathi preparing the records of rights (7/12) and

'farmers' book' along with a rough map of the plot. After receiving these documents from the Collector's office, the District Inspector of Land Records (DILR) had to send surveyors to prepare final map, physically mark it out and hand over its possession to the beneficiary in presence of the collector's representative. This procedure was not carried out in most cases. The beneficiaries were also deprived of Rs 5000 per acre due to them as per rules. The officers responsible for it could be punished as per a government notification of 1989 but no action was taken. In case of the SC/ST beneficiaries, Atrocities Act also could be invoked.

The CSJ struggle set the state machinery into action, enabling Dalits in Vav taluka to take possession of their lands. But alas, this impressive struggle sadly failed to enthuse the reservation-obsessed middle classes of Dalits, revealing the ugly faultline of emerging classes among Dalits.

### **Anti-Dalit Attitude of the State**

Although, like any other Dalit episode, this may also be a pan Indian phenomenon, nevertheless Gujarat strangely comes out as a piece of villain in recent revelations vis-à-vis Dalits. A CSJ study of 400 judgements delivered by the special courts in 16 districts of Gujarat since 1 April 1995 revealed a shocking pattern behind the collapse of cases filed under the Atrocities Act: utterly negligent police investigation at both the higher and lower levels and distinctly hostile role played by the public prosecutors. In over 95 per cent of the cases, acquittals had resulted due to technical lapses by the investigation and prosecution, and in the remaining five per cent, court directives were flouted by the government. The government's casual attitude was underscored by the statement of its chief minister in the Assembly when he stated, contrary to the Rule, that the cases under the Atrocity Act was to be investigated by an officer not above the rank of DSP.

One wonders whether this plight of Dalits at the hands of Gujarat government is because of its ideological adherence to Hindutva or because of its neoliberal vibrancy. As it appears, perhaps it is the result of both these mutually reinforcing factors, a kind of vile resonance!

# Yet Another Binayak Sen

08 February, 2011

No, he is not like Dr Binayak Sen, coming from a middle class Bhadralok family with a big degree in medicine from a prestigious medical school, enviable academic record and certain well deserved decorations in his profession. Sudhir Dhawale is a prototype of a contemporary dalit activist: coming from a poor family, moderately educated and without any notable social acclaim. What makes them similar apart from their unflinching dedication to the oppressed humanity is the neurotic behavior of the state towards them. Binayak Sen's case is by now world famous, tearing down the veneer of all state claims to democracy. Sudhir's hopefully is adding to the shame of the establishment.

## Playing Foul against People

All that the Indian state reflects in these episodes is that it wants to play foul against its own people, no matter how high the costs to the country. Binayak Sen, given his credentials and record of service to the people evoked huge indignation of the middle classes against the treatment meted out to him by the state. Soon this indignation spread into a movement joined by the international solidarity groups, which was supported even by 22 Nobel laureates from all over the world. The amount of protest his arrest generated reminded one of Nelson Mandela of 1970s. The clamour for his release however overshadowed the fact that there were thousands of others languishing in Indian jails for years for the same crime as his. Many of them were innocent enough not to know what they were there for and had resigned to their fate. Nonetheless, the unprecedented magnitude of the protest movement around Binayak sen made one think that the foolhardy Chhattisgarh state would realize its mistake and seek honourable exit at the earliest opportune time. But to the dismay of many, the state, in its true fascist elements, persisted with

charges and opposed his bail tooth and nail. Luckily it was granted by the Supreme Court, which had rejected it previously, surprisingly without any argument.

As the information on the trial trickled in that most witnesses of the state turned hostile and the jail staff categorically dismissed the possibility of the letters going out of the security jail, the pivotal charge against Sen and even two others, the people innocently hoped that the ordeal of Binayak Sen and his family would come to an end. But they were rudely shattered by the court awarding Binayak Sen and his co-accused Piyush Guha and Narayan Sanyal life imprisonment. Like many recent judgements, the court verdict was reflecting the executive plan, marring the much celebrated independence of the judiciary. It was necessary for the state to plan face saving move and it appears to have done precisely that by confirming his guilt through the lower court. The strategy was to show that Sen was not unnecessarily targeted as accused by the protest movement and simultaneously threaten the latter that it should not take on the state. It nearly boomeranged because scores of intellectuals came in solidarity with Sen and dared the state with a slogan “hum sub Binayak hai”.

At least now the state was expected not to repeat its mistake by harassing someone demonstrably innocent. But the state intoxicated with totalitarian power may not be rational. Although, technically Sen’s was the Chhattisgarh state affair, in reality it echoed the anti-naxal strategy of the center. Other states also could demonstrate their prowess by creating their own Binayak Sens. As the campaign on Binayak Sen had reached its high pitch, Maharashtra government has gone ahead with spree of arrests one of which is already likened to Binayak Sen’s.

### **Sudhir Dhawale**

Sudhir Dhawale, as the entire Mumbai’s progressive circle knows, has been working as freelance journalist and full time social worker since

1995. In 1999, he played a leading role in organizing a Vidrohi Sahitya Sammelan, opposing the state sponsored Brahmanical literary extravaganza, in Dharavi slum which was presided over by the late progressive Dalit litterateur Baburao Bagul. On 11 July 1997, when the police gunned down 10 innocent Dalits in Ramabai Nagar (in Ghatkopar, Mumbai) while protesting the desecration of Dr Ambedkar's statue, Sudhir got actively involved in the Committee formed to get the culprit, a petty police sub inspector Manohar Kadam, punished. The Vidrohi literary conference transformed into a Vidrohi Sanskrutik Movement (Rebel cultural movement), of which Sudhir was the main organizer. As a part of this movement, he launched a Vidrohi Prakashan with small donations and loan and soon began publishing a monthly 'Vidrohi', of which he was the editor. Besides, he has been writing and publishing pamphlets and booklets which helped spread awareness about the plight of dalits and adivasis. Sudhir thus became an integral part of the progressive movement in Maharashtra. He actively worked along with others for reaching relief to victims of caste atrocities and helping them get justice. Some of these cases that he was involved in are: Murder of Rohidas Tupe in Palgaon near Aurangabad, Baban Misal murder in Nagar district, murder of Sadahiv Salve Guruji at Mazhil in Beed district, murder of Rohan Kakade in Satara, rape and murder of Manorama Kamble in Nagpur, murder of Sahebrao Jondhale in Hingoli district, Saujanya Jadhav case in Navi Mumbai, a case of Meera Kamble who was paraded naked at Reay Road, Mumbai, Ahiwale case in Satara district, and the murder of an old Adivasi couple at Mauda in Nagpur district. He had also played prominent role in Khairlanji protests.

Sudhir's activism subsisted on a small sum donated by friends. His wife Darshana, one time noted woman activist worked as a nurse in Babasaheb Ambedkar Memorial Hospital, Byculla and took care of the household and their two children. Everyone connected with the progressive circle in Mumbai knew these facts. And perhaps that is why his arrest on 2 January 2011 caused a spontaneous furor that

crystallized into forming a committee called 'Sudhir Dhawale Mukтата Abhiyan'.

### **Repeat of the farce**

Sudhir Dhawale was arrested on 2 January 2011 at 9.45 pm at Wardha Railway Station by the Gondia police while returning home after attending the Youth Dalit Literature Conference and a meeting relating to atrocities on Dalits at Wardha. According to Police, one Bhimrao Bhoite, claimed by police to be the state committee member of the CPI (Maoist), stated in his interrogation that he had given his computer to him. Sudhir is charged under the sections 17, 20, 39 of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and sections 121/124 (a) of the Indian Penal Code, which amounts to sedition and declaration of war against the Indian State. The next day, the Gondia and Mumbai police ransacked Sudhir's house and took away his computer and 87 books, none of which could be remotely illegal. The unlawful manner in which the raid was conducted impelled Darashana to file a police complaint the next day.

Granting the hypersensitivity of the State about Maoism, promoted by none other than the Prime Minister and the Home minister, no one denies the police right to interrogate Sudhir in order to be reasonably sure about his involvement in unlawful activities. Surely, someone telling police somebody's name, does not constitute the basis to suspect the latter as accomplice in the crime, particularly when he is socially well known. Only after making reasonably sure about his crime the police could arrest him. But police pounced upon Sudhir, handcuffed him and slapped the package of charges they readied for the so called Maoists. Contrast it with the criminal cases against the likes of Suresh Kalmadi, Raja, etc. or the scores of bigwig babus and politicians involved in Adarsh society scam or the money launderer like Hassan Ali. Despite all their dirty linen being available in the public domain for months and years the police would respectfully interview (not interrogate) them and never arrest.



Sudhir Dhawale's arrest angered many people. In an almost unprecedented manner all shades of Dalits came together and voiced their protest in unison. The entire progressive Maharashtra comprising its who's who came out in active support. Protests are taking place almost daily all over the state. A delegation of prominent people met the home minister who had assured them that he would ask the DIG to enquire into it and not to harass him if he was not involved. On 12 January Sudhir along with six others were produced before the court, which gave him and one Shailesh Wakde an MCR, and extended the PCR for the rest. It was expected that in face of the huge protest, the state will not play its worn out trick by slapping new charges once a person is acquitted from the old ones. But here the state even did not wait for the court proceedings. Just after two days, they roped in Sudhir in an old case of postering at Gondia and took him back into police custody. Quite like Binayak Sen, the evidence against the police charges was so dismissive that it was exposing the state's malafide intention. As against the charge of Bhoite's computer being with Sudhir, Sudhir's wife was showing the receipt for their newly bought computer. And on the date of postering at Gondia, there was ample evidence that Sudhir was in Mumbai.

### **Caste, Class and Ideology**

The bogey of Maoism is being unscrupulously used to repress the incipient democratic dissent of Dalits and Adivasis. Most people arrested as Maoists in Maharashtra are Dalits. Maoist label overshadows their caste identity and renders them helpless. Although the ruling classes have succeeded in decimating the dalit movement, the Ambedkarite consciousness among Dalits in Maharashtra is alive and manifests itself into militant reaction against the systemic injustice as in Khairlanji. It is this incipient dissent the state wants to nip in bud by putting the label of Maoists on Dalit youth. The same phenomenon could be observed in other states depending on the degree of dalit consciousness.

Having banned the CPI (Maoist) party and its mass organizations in June 2009, belonging to them becomes an unlawful act attracting the Draconian provisions of UAPA and such other laws. But the distinction between the organization and the ideology is deliberately blurred and people are charged for being Maoist on the ridiculous evidence of possessing literature of Marx, Lenin, Mao and even Ambedkar. Many people have ridiculed the police claim saying that they possess more such literature than all the Maoists together could do. In most cases, the accused get acquitted of all charges but by then they undergo minimum of 3-4 years of imprisonment and police torture. Even if they were not Maoists to start with, by the time they come out of prison, they definitely become one. Police repression thus has been the biggest catalyst in manufacturing Maoists and the police their biggest recruitment agents. Every unlawful act of the state repression has brought windfall benefits to the latter.

It is high time people realized this fact and chastised the government not to play foul with its own people in the long term interest of this country.

# Notion Of Freedom And Reality Of Unfreedom

15 February, 2011

India is a living paradox: a rich country by natural endowment being a home to unparalleled poverty, destitution and misery. It proclaims lofty theses and practices ugliest antitheses. India's liberal Constitution proudly pronounced its preamble in the name of Indian people that they have resolved "to constitute India into a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic Republic and to ensure to all its citizens: Justice-social, economic and political; Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; Equality of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation." In reality, the working of the Constitution over the last six decades made it sound like a joke, worse than just an antithesis. While this paradox grew over the years, people reconciled the odds as the price to be paid for democracy and freedom. But from the early 1990s, with the inauguration of neoliberal reforms, they have been experiencing decline of democracy and fast erosion of their freedom. In view of this popular experience these concepts are increasingly problematic.

## The Idea of Freedom

Philosophers from Plato, Kant down to Hegel regarded freedom as real and as having important ontological implications, "for soul or mind or divinity". In philosophy, the idea of freedom comes from the concept of free will. Rudolf Steiner for instance while discussing freedom in his seminal philosophical work *The Philosophy of Freedom* focuses on the concept of free will. According to Steiner freedom can only be approached asymptotically and with the aid of the "creative activity" of thinking. It is the spiritual activity of penetrating with consciousness our own nature and that of the world, and the real activity of acting in full consciousness. Steiner initially divides the problem of free will into freedom of thought and freedom

of action. He argues that inner freedom is achieved when we bridge the gap between our perception, which reflect the outer appearance of the world, and our cognition, which give us access to the inner structure of the world; and that outer freedom arises when we bridge the gap between our ideals and the constraints of external reality, letting our deeds be inspired by what he terms moral imagination. Steiner considers inner and outer freedom as integral to one another, and that true freedom is only achieved when they are united. According to Thomas Hobbes, for example, “a free man is he that... is not hindered to do what he hath the will to do.” Later, freedom was influenced by ideals concerning the social contract as well as arguments that are concerned with the state of nature. It is generally spoken in terms of positive liberty and negative liberty. Positive liberty asserts that freedom is found in a person’s ability to exercise agency, particularly in the sense of having the power and resources to carry out their own will, without being inhibited by the structural inhibitions from society. In the negative sense, one is considered free to the extent to which no person interferes with his or her activity. The major impetus to the idea came from the French Revolution, which according to Hegel constitutes the introduction of real

individual political freedom into European societies for the first time in recorded history. Later, it got wider sanction through the Universal declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) on 10 December 1948 by the United Nations (UN), which championed the right to life, liberty and security of person; the right to education; right to participate fully in cultural life; freedom from torture or cruel, inhumane treatment or punishment and freedom of thought, conscience and religion. The UDHR is based on the “inherent dignity” of all people and affirms the equal rights of all men and women, in addition to their right to freedom. The Declaration gives human rights precedence over the power of the state. While states are permitted to regulate rights, they are prohibited from violating them. As a UN member state, India is bound by the UN Charter, which pledges member states to promote

and encourage respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion, and by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

### **The Genesis of Constitutional Freedom**

In India Freedom came into common parlance through the freedom struggle aimed at driving away the British rulers. It was projected as 'self rule' of Indians but was associated with the exit of the British. As such when the transfer of power did take place in 1947 from the British to the Congress Party, representative of the emergent class of bourgeoisie and landed interests, people were made to rejoice that they were free. The imperative of governance of a diverse polity, divided into innumerable castes, many languages, religions, races, etc and distributed in diverse regions as well as political systems (British India and 500 odd princely states) led to the creation of liberal Constitution with a lofty vision given in its preamble. In any case, the new regime could not retreat from the liberal ethos of the colonial regime and the impact of the Bolshevik revolution. The Constitution proclaimed India to be a republic with sovereignty vested in its people. People were to be its real masters. It was to be a ruse to bring people together to believe in a common destiny of an imaginary nation. The ruling classes were assured by the fact that there wasn't a method to exercise this mastery. It had to be through them or their proxies as representatives of people.

The Constitution of India contained the right to freedom, given in articles 19, 20, 21 and 22, with the view of guaranteeing individual rights that were considered vital. The right to freedom in Article 19 guarantees the following six freedoms: (i) Freedom of speech and expression, (ii) Freedom to assemble peacefully without arms, (iii) Freedom to form associations or unions, (iv) Freedom to move freely throughout the territory of India, (v) Freedom to reside and settle in any part of the territory of India, and (vi) Freedom to practice any profession or to carry on any occupation, trade or business. The constitution also guarantees the right to life and personal liberty,

which in turn cites specific provisions in which these rights are applied and enforced: Protection with respect to conviction for offences is guaranteed in the right to life and personal liberty; Protection of life and personal liberty is also stated under right to life and personal liberty; Rights of a person arrested under ordinary circumstances is laid down in the right to life and personal liberty. In 2002, through the 86th Amendment Act, Article 21(A) was incorporated. It made the right to primary education part of the right to freedom, stating that the State would provide free and compulsory education to children from six to fourteen years of age. The Constitution also imposes restrictions on these freedoms and rights. The restrictions are put in the interest of the independence, sovereignty and integrity of India; morality and public order. The right to life and personal liberty are supposed to be exceptions. However, all the six freedoms are suspended during a state of emergency.

### **The reality of Unfreedom**

The Indian state is bound by the Constitution, the UDHR and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 16 December 1966 and enforced from March 23, 1976 to respect the rights of Indians to freedom. However, going by the experience of majority of people, its track record reflects more of their violation than compliance. The traditional social structure of caste hierarchy that apportioned all rights to upper layers and obligations to lower ones, is in fact reinforced in many ways by the modern constitutional paradigm. The result has been gross negation of rights to the people whom they are most relevant. Although, given the class character of the State, these rights were not fundamentally meant to be observed, their non-observance was apologetically acknowledged until mid 1970s. The political contradictions induced by the post-1947 developmental paradigm led to imposition of emergency for nearly two years during which all rights were suspended. Its lifting in 1977 supposedly restored them but the trend for erosion of freedom was

set in which soon got accelerated with the inauguration of the neoliberal reforms. The crisis unleashed by the elitist strategy over the last two decades has its direct reflection in the dismal state of freedom of people.

Constitutional rights to various freedoms have their direct negation in the reality correlates for the majority of people. Freedom of expression is decimated by the unscrupulous use of sedition laws to curb peoples' democratic descent supplemented by the draconian laws like Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, Maintenance of Internal Security Act, 1971, National Security Act, 1980, Preventive Detention Act, 1950, Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2002, Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance, 2001, Terrorist Affected Areas (Special Courts) Act, 1984, Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, 1985, Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, and so on. Intimately linked with democracy, freedom of expression is constricted to small closeted pockets like Azad maidan in Mumbai or Jantar Mantar in Delhi, surrounded by huge posse of police. The freedoms to assemble and to form associations are generally throttled with the bureaucratic processes and are brutally crushed if they speak about radical change. Freedom of religion is directly threatened by the anti-conversion laws enacted by many states like Gujarat and Karnataka. The naked practice of majoritarian communalism by mainstream parties and tacitly followed by the State has rendered it meaningless. People do have freedom to live anywhere but no more for the poor, who could be harassed with impunity by the outfits like Shiv Sena and MNS in Maharashtra. Freedom to follow any occupation was seriously constrained by the caste ridden social structure and as such was irrelevant for teaming millions. It verily stays so; it is still structurally determined. All the instruments of upliftment (progress) education, land, employment are caste dependent. The state of the freedom of thought gets exposed when the Police arrest people for being Maoists and confiscate the books by Marx, Lenin, Mao, Bhagatsingh and even Ambedkar. While it tolerates Hindutva that has killed thousands

and poisoned the polity to irreparable degree, it would call naxalism as its greatest internal security threat.

In sum, the Indian people suffer extreme unfreedom, both in structure and processes of the State as well as civil society. All that is spoken of freedoms is reserved for a handful of elites, the people in the Constitution, who have made all others as non-people.



# Caste'ing Live Chitradurga's Madigas And Nayakas

11 November, 2010

Caste in India is a terrible thing. It can surface anywhere in a weirdest manner and forms. In the Chitradurga district of Karnataka, famed for the rule of Nayakas, the chieftain whose descendents have strangely found a place in the schedule for Tribes, prepared by the independent India to do them social justice, it still survives in its pristine glory. Nayakas, who in no way reflect their regal connection today however have a complex of being the rulers of the region for over two centuries after the fall of Vijayanagara empire and until Hyder Ali dislodged them in 1779. Their ancestors were known for their bravery that had compelled the mighty Vijayanagara king to concede Chitradurga governorship to their Timmanna Nayaka and which had returned Hyder Ali's attack twice before he finally managed to defeat them; they try out their bravery over the poor Madigas in every village. Result, a strange and bizarre casteism perpetrated by the Scheduled Tribes over the Scheduled Castes that are uncritically clubbed together as 'dalits'.

## Whispering Crimes

The misdoings of Nayakas have been pervasive but occasionally they precipitated into a notable incident that found place in local newspaper but rarely leaked past the district boundaries. Through the network of rights and dalit activists the attenuated whispers of crime sometimes reached out. Taking a cumulative stock of them we organized a fact finding cum a survey of the condition of Madigas, the victims of the Nayaka overlordship. Along with me Adithya of PUCL, Karnataka, Abhishek of Swabhimani Dalit Shakti, Bangalore and Harish of Pedestrian Pictures, Bangalore comprised the team. Within our resources we just managed to visit four villages on two

days, 27 and 28 October 2010 and scratch the veneer of quietude they wore and sense the terrible undercurrent of caste atrocities.

While all the villages superficially projected a macro picture of Madigas being traditionally oppressed by the Nayakas into submission, the micro reality revealed streak of awakening among the former. Although the poverty and numbers of Madigas rendered them generally tolerant to the tyranny of relatively rich and numerous Nayakas, there were enough signs that they were prepared to resist. The very incidents of atrocities were rather the proof enough that the Madigas were resisting. Submission does not beget atrocity; resistance definitely does. The attitude of the administration and the media was typically apathetic. They would first get into denial mode and then would jump onto generalizations that such happenings were not unique to the district and could be found all over the state. May be, but then it is more terrible!

### **Bhagyama of Laxmisagara**

There was a shocking incident last year of 30-40 people attacking and parading a hapless dalit woman naked in a village Laxmisagara, some – km away from Chitradurga. Bhagyama and her husband Sukanand, who live now in distant Kolar district, where Bhagyama was given a job in a school by the government, had come on one of their dates to attend the court. Bhagyama, a well built young woman in her twenties narrated her harrowing tale wiping the tears welling into her eyes as she spoke. She was attacked because the Nayakas suspected her to be behind the elopement of their girl –Mamata with a Madiga boy- Kumar. Mamata and Kumar, in love with each other, had run away from home to Davangere on 17 January 2009 to marry. The Nayaka mob entered Bhagyama's house, beat her up and her husband, tore her clothes away, paraded her naked to the panchayat office and locked her up there. Three other boys, Ashok, Manju and Kippesamy, who came to help her also got beaten. Some one reported the matter to Baramsagara police station. When the police arrived, they picked up Bhagyaman in the same state, her

husband along with the three youth to the police station. When they stopped at a dhaba for breakfast, a person recognised Bhagyama and gave her a cloth to wear but the police did not allow her. She just wrapped it round her bare body. At the police station they took her signatures on blank papers and threatened her that they would burn her if she spoke about it outside.

The Nayakas, with the help of Baramsagara police station learnt of the whereabouts of Kumar and Mamata and went to Davangere. They had married and were at the Gandhinagar police station. While the Baramsagara Police were bringing them back at 9.30 pm, on the way the Nayakas attacked Kumar but he managed to escape. Mamata was brought home and taken to the police station the next day. It was only when Mamata testified that Bhagyama did not have any role in their affair, that the police had released her. She was admitted into the government hospital for eight days for severe bleeding at her private parts. Police did not take any action and rather registered a counter case on her along with other Madiga boys. S Anjanayya, Ex MLA was prepared to settle the matter but later denied that such an incident ever took place. He said that the Madiga youth had committed a mistake and hence the Nayakas had beaten some Madiga boys. Only after the matter was flashed in DNA of 27 January 2010 the things began to shake. The Swabhimani Dalit Shakthii (SDS) organised a rally in Chitradurga town wherein Bhagyama publicly narrated her plight before over 1000 people. The DC and SP who were in denial mode until then took cognisance of the crime and arrested one Nayaka youth, Vasant. Around then Udaya TV channel beamed an interview with Shivlingam, president of the SDS, who spoke out all the details of this case. The CM ordered an enquiry into the incident and Bhagyama was given Rs. 25000 and a job in Morarji Desai Residential School, Dodda Ballapura in March 2009. She gets Rs. 2000 a month and stay in a rented house. But much of this money goes away in her bus fare when she has to commute to Chitradurga for her case and the counter case filed by Nayakas.

When we visited her village to see the places and meet with witnesses, the fear was still palpable in the eyes of Madigas even after nearly 10 months were elapsed. We wanted to meet some of the Nayakas but they feared that even we might be insulted or attacked.

### **Famished Fighters of Hosrangapura**

Hosrangapura is relatively a tiny village of 22 Madiga and 85 Nayaka households but has created a big history of caste oppression on account of their battle for land. Initially, the Madigas cultivated 11 acres of Devasthanam land controlled by Nayakas. But later, the Nayakas took away it and drove Madigas to occupy and cultivate 16 acres land at the other end of the village. For some years this arrangement went smooth but the Nayakas began asking the land as gomala (grazing) land. Nayakas attacked Madigas in 1991 when some 4-5 Madigas were injured and a case was filed against Nayakas in the police station. Nayakas got scared and let the Madigas cultivate the land. However, in 2001 the Nayakas filed a case before the civil judge to get the land back as gomala land. The Jr Divisional judge ruled against them in 2006 on the strength of the affidavit of the Tehsildar that the land was under cultivation of the Madigas for over 25 years. Nayakas appealed to Sr Divisional judge, who also ruled in 2009 that the land was not gomala land and opined that the Tehsildar could consider allotting it to the Madigas. Not satisfied with these verdicts, the Nayakas appealed to the High Court but their appeal was dismissed.

After the judicial process established that the land was no gomala land, when the Madigas went to cultivate it in 2010, the Nayakas attacked them allegedly with the support from Chandrappa, the local MLA, injuring many of them.. SDS took up their case and organised a rally in Chitradurga on 15 September 2010 and exposed the matter to the district administration. Nothing however happened because the Bagarhukum committee that allots the land called it a gomala land in defiance of all the court judgements and declined to allot it to the Madigas. It was found that the committee was wrongly constituted.

After the agitation of the Madigas under SDS, the government properly constituted it with Basavarajan, MLA, Chitradurga as its chairman. While the administration voiced sympathy for Madigas and even MLA also is said to be in their favour, the fact remains that the Madigas did not get their land back. They had a massive procession in Chitradurga on 29 October which marked a indefinite dharana, starting with the protest of children. The people who get Rs 30 for a whole day's of hard labour have battled against the powerful Nayakas for the last 10 years for the land they cultivated for more than 25 years and still justice evades them!

### **Budhihali to Buddhanagar in Desperation**

Budhihalli, some 35 km from a Chellakere town deceptively looked normal, with entire of its Madiga community, save for five blacksheeps, having left it to settle in the makeshift colony which they named Buddhanagar, on the outskirts of Chellakere town to escape oppression of the Nayakas and Golas. Madigas historically worked as bonded labour and faced all kinds of oppression at the hands of powerful Nayaka community. They narrated harrowing stories of how Nayakas could do whatever they wanted, including sex with the Madiga women with impunity. The village had a lot of government land which was auctioned by the panchayat committee every year for cultivation but it always went to Nayakas. Over the years, the Madigas developed aspiration to escape the bondage of the Nayakas. On 22 December 2009 they cleared the bushes on the government land and took them as firewood but were stopped by the Nayakas. On 25 December, Nayakas called a panchayat meeting but the Madiga members refused to participate. They were forcibly taken to the meeting. At that night, around 10.30 pm, Nayakas attacked the Madigas, not sparing even their women and children. From next day, they decided to observe undeclared social boycott. Nayakas wooed five Madiga families on their side and began harassing through them. Many skirmishes took place. The harassment reached such a pitch that Madigas were left with no option than leaving the village. Their exodus stopped at the outskirts of Chellakere.

A local activist Shiv Murthy of Human Rights for Dalit Liberation, Karnataka (HRFDLK) took up their case and exposed the matter to the outside world. DNA of 27 January covered the plight of Madigas, focusing mainly on the sexual abuse of Madiga women. It shocked people and many organizations, such as AIDWA, PUCL rushed for fact finding. All these however failed to wake up the administration which still remains unmoved over the plight of Madigas. On the contrary, it echoes Nayakas' accusation that Shiv Murthy, who has since left his home and been staying with the Budhihalli Madigas in a hut, as trouble monger.

### **Tension at Renukapuram**

Unlike most villages, Madigas in Renukapuram compared well with the dominant Nayakas in numbers but still they could not resist their oppression because the other communities (Lingayats, Newars, Shettys, etc.) ganged up against them rendering them a miniscule minority. In 1995, the Madigas first raised their voice against the 'two tumbler system' being followed in the restaurants. They would be served eatables in old newspapers whereas others were given it in plates. The fight broke out and four Madigas were injured. While they were going to police station in a bus to file a complaint, they were again stopped and 14 people were beaten. The complaint was filed but the Madigas had to flee the village for a fortnight as they were threatened that they would be killed. The village declared social boycott of Madigas. The case ran for 15 years. A compromise was struck and the case was withdrawn. The normalcy prevailed for a couple of months but again the Nayakas started harassing the Madigas. During the last village festival, a Madiga boy was beaten in front of the police sub-inspector for trying to participate in pulling the chariot. A police complaint was filed but the tension in village is built up to such an extent that the customary preparations for the Renuka festival to be observed in November were still not in sight.

In 2007, this village had seen a gruesome murder of a Madiga bonded labourer, Nagendra, who had fallen in love with the daughter

of a Lingayat landlord. Nothing ever happened and the case was hushed up as suicide.

## **Conclusion**

The four villages that we visited reflected their specific problems but they all underscored the deep rooted practice of untouchability against the Madigas by the Nayakas, the dominant community in the Chitradurga district. Even the other castes like Lingayats and Golas followed the Nayakas in oppressing the Madigas. This sample study, without any claim to its scientific design, adequately supports the surmise that the entire Chitradurga district (if not beyond) is afflicted with the acute problem of untouchability, declared unlawful through the Constitution. The apathetic attitude of the administration is abominable towards this blatant crime. The civil society, media and even the dalit leaders failed to take up the issues of the victims. The latter divided in various factions appear scoring over each other than working to ameliorate the plight of the Madigas.

Interestingly the perpetrators of the crime here are the people who are scheduled tribes. While, it is stereotypically noted that the Atrocity Act fails to apply to them, it is forgotten that these crimes are cognizable in a normal IPC. Nayakas go scot-free not because of the inapplicability of the Atrocity Act but because of the general bias of the State against the Madigas, the Dalits. This bias marks out the essential character of the contemporary castes that spells a break between the caste Hindus and non-caste Dalits. Tribals, it must be remembered are not untouchables; they are actually not a part of the Hindu social order. The extension of special provisions for the untouchables (SCs) to them was on account of their secular seclusion for a long time and therefore possible bias of the society against them. While there was an objective criterion of untouchability for inclusion of people in the SC-schedule, there was no such objective criterion for inclusion of people in the schedule for tribes. As a result, many powerful communities got included in that schedule, depriving the other genuine tribes from the Constitutional provisions. The

examples are replete with the cases of some single tribe in any state usurping all the benefits of the STs. Nayakas are the definite case in Karnataka. It may be noted that many communities agitate for their inclusion into the schedule for tribes (e.g., – in Rajasthan) but none demands being included as the scheduled caste.

It exposes the folly of definitional adventurism of Dalits that casually combines the untouchables and tribes or the bahun strategy of the politicians and their cohorts that conceives the merger of castes against the imagined enemy of Manuwada, ignoring the material contradictions among these castes. Madigas of Chitradurga were bewildered at the prospects of their emancipation because as anywhere else they are structurally handicapped in the battle against the dominant castes.



# Satyam's Raju And Satyam Babu

31 December, 2010

*Rich and powerful “fraudsters” like Satyam’s Ramalinga Raju will get away; the down and out like Satyam Babu, a poor dalit wrongly convicted for a murder he did not commit, will rot in jail. Caste and – its modern correlate – class matter as never before in India today*

With bigger and bigger scams unfolding in rapid succession, peoples’ sensibilities are getting blunted even more quickly, further emboldening the potential “scamsters” to commit still larger frauds. Before the hearsay of one scam dies down, another one erupts and overtakes the former. In recent weeks, the Commonwealth Games (CWG) scam has been effectively displaced by the 2G spectrum scam of a mind-boggling Rs 1,76,000 crore, making all the scams of the past appear insignificant. The only impact these scams seem to have is to raise the television rating points (TRP) of the news channels and deepen public cynicism about the state of governance in the country. Over the last six decades there have been so many scams but hardly any scamster has really been convicted and punished. Every time a scam broke out, people heard that the law would take its own course and saw that course being deflected by pelf and power into nothingness. Indeed, nothing ever happens to the scamsters, fraudsters and criminals in India if they are rich and powerful. While the criminals among politicians, bureaucrats, industrialists, businessmen, brokers, and speculators loot this country with impunity, and continue to enjoy power and prestige, scores of innocent people are incarcerated in jails either for their political beliefs under the repressive laws like the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, Chhattisgarh Special Public Security Act, or merely because they are poor and defenceless as scapegoats. A significant percentage of prisoners who spent a number of years in jail do not know what they were there for. They only know the fact that they do not have money to defend themselves and mutely accept their fate.

Last month, the grant of bail to one of the biggest corporate fraudsters, Ramalinga Raju had created some amount of hubbub among people. Raju's accomplices – his brother and former managing director Rama Raju, former chief financial officer Vadlamani Srinivas, the two partners of the audit firm, Pricewaterhouse, Gopalakrishnan and Srinivas – were already given bail. People do know that ultimately nothing will happen to Raju, but to grant him bail even before the investigations were over was a little too much to swallow. Had the Supreme Court not intervened against this bail, Raju would have been already a free bird. Interestingly, around the same time, another case that curiously stirred up people, particularly dalits, Muslims and civil rights activists in the same state of Andhra Pradesh was the Ayesha Meera murder case in which an apparently innocent dalit youth was awarded life imprisonment, seemingly to save the real culprit who came from a powerful political family.

### **Who Is Satyam Babu?**

Satyam Babu may be said to be the opposite of Ramalinga Raju of Satyam Computers. He is a poor dalit boy in his early 20s, whereas Raju is an upper caste – Telugu kshatriya (Raju is a Telugu variation of the Sanskrit word raja meaning king), in his late 50s, having already lived a “royal” life. Babu is said to be a part time mason, who indulged in petty thieving as evidenced at least by the six-month jail term he underwent for stealing a cellphone. He did whatever he could for the sheer survival of his mother, sister and himself. Ramalinga Raju was one of the most respected business leaders, one of the leading lights of the new breed of entrepreneurs in the field of information technology (IT), much decorated by the corporate world. He indulged in stealing for sheer greed, the unending lust for accumulation.

Babu perhaps thieved from faceless strangers and Raju stole from his shareholders in utter breach of their faith. Babu's confession was extracted in the Ayesha Meera case by the police through brutal torture, which turned him into a mental wreck. Raju confessed when

his crime had already surfaced in the media and could no more be covered up. He then drove in his Mercedes cavalcade and surrendered to the police. Anyone going through the court proceedings would doubt whether Satyam Babu is really guilty of the crime for which he has already earned imprisonment for life. There is no doubt about Raju's crime which happens to be the biggest crime in the history of corporate India and yet no charge sheet has been filed against him. Babu does not have the resources to defend himself whereas Raju has a battery of legal luminaries at his disposal to create turbulence for his eventual escape. In many ways, Satyam Babu and Satyam Raju present a stark contrast and illustrate how a poor and innocent dalit boy could be literally dumped in jail for the rest of his life and how nothing happens to an upper caste and upper class criminal, all under the due process of law.

Satyam Babu is currently languishing in Vijayawada jail, convicted with life imprisonment by the sessions' judge for allegedly raping and killing 17-year-old Ayesha in a girls' hostel at Ibrahimpatnam. The case, because of the incredible narrative constructed by the prosecution, has created a huge uproar in Andhra Pradesh. While Satyam Babu was tortured in the jail into confessing the crime he never committed, in the process damaging his spinal cord and creating the Guillen Barre syndrome that has disabled him, Ramalinga Raju, who admitted having defrauded the public for Rs 7,800 crore over six years, is enjoying special facilities in the Chanchalguda Central jail in Hyderabad.

### **Finding a Scapegoat**

Right from the beginning, the Ayesha Meera case got engulfed in controversy as people, including the chairman, AP State Minorities Commission, Janab Yousuf Qureshi, and a member of the National Commission for Women, Nirmala Venkatesh, who visited the scene suspected connivance of the warden and insiders in the crime. The student community and the public agitated over the issue and demanded the arrest of the culprit. The matter soon entered the state

assembly, mounting pressure on police. The Ibrahimpatnam police went berserk, arresting a number of persons and eventually settled on a hapless poor dalit boy, Satyam Babu of Anasagaram village, a hamlet of Nandigama in Krishna district, as the culprit. They tortured him and extracted a confession. The Mahila Sessions Court in Vijayawada held him guilty of the crime only by matching his handwriting with a love letter allegedly found on the body of Ayesha and the DNA profile of the criminal created by the police. The sentence created a further public uproar because it is strongly believed that the letter and the DNA profile were fabricated by the police. Interestingly, before Satyam Babu the police had succeeded in matching one or the other marks of the crime with the previous suspects and declared that the Ayesha murder case was solved. They later retracted as those suspects turned out to be not as defenceless as Satyam Babu.

Shamshad Begum, Ayesha's mother, an educated and articulate lady has been making public statements that the police was making a scapegoat of Satyam Babu in order to save the real criminal in Koneru Satish Babu, sarpanch of Gudavalli village, and the grandson of former minister Koneru Ranga Rao in YSR's as well as Rosaiah's government. Indeed, there was strong evidence against him. He frequently visited the hostel and had parties with the warden Padma and her husband. On that fateful night also, he had partied, parking his Scorpio before the hostel. The next day he admitted himself into the Chennamaneni Pali clinic in Vijayawada without any reason. It is said that the police commissioner had gathered these details and was about to arrest him but was thwarted by the politicians. The local people, the hostel inmates and those who examined the scene of the murder, including Nirmala Venkatesh, dismissed the possibility of any outsider committing the crime without connivance of the warden or some insider. Therefore, they demanded a narcoanalysis test on K Satish Babu, the warden's husband and Cheruku Madhav Rao, Mandal Parishad President, who had visited the scene before the police arrived. Dalit, Muslim, and civil rights organisations,

campaigning against the injustice to Satyam Babu have demanded reinvestigation of the case by some independent agency.

### **Sheltering the Big Sharks**

During the colonial times, it is sometimes alleged that white British people received favourable treatment vis-à-vis Indians by the courts, but, by and large, equality before the law prevailed. Although our Constitution imbibed that principle, our practice has recoiled to the native code of Manu where people are differentiated by caste and its contemporary correlate, class. How else do we find no big shark ever falling into the net? Right from the first corporate crime of Haridas Mundra, who sold fake shares of his companies to the willing buyer in Life Insurance Corporation in the 1950s to the current Satyam fraud, or the numerous cases of corruption by politicians and bureaucrats, no one really ever gets punished. It is a standing testimony to their crime that India, according to Swiss Banking Association Report 2008, has \$1,891 billion of black money, more than all the black money of the rest of the world, stashed away in Swiss banks. Occasionally, there may be some forced resignation of a minister or an arrest of some culprit, but never does it lead to the confiscation of their wealth or conviction commensurate with the crime. As for Raju, he has already retracted his admission and turned the tables onto the Central Bureau of Investigation to prove his crime. It is anybody's guess what will happen to him!

Talking of the other recent scams, Suresh Kalmadi of the CWG fame, the scam that shamed the nation for more than a month preceding the games was reportedly “snubbed” for his misdoing but was found coolly enjoying the Guangzhou games without any trace of remorse. In an act of political expediency, while Ashok Chavan was made to resign, the other political bigwigs like Sushil Kumar Shinde, Vilasrao Deshmukh and scores of babus involved in the making of the Adarsh Society scam, remain respectably untouched. A Raja of the 2G scam has been made to resign from his post as the union telecom minister but others who enabled the scam, directly or indirectly, or shared the

booty, will remain untouched. For the Chavans or the Rajas, or the Madhu Kudas before them, it is just an interlude; everyone knows that they will soon be back with redoubled zeal. Can anyone imagine that Kalmadi or Raja or their accomplices will really be serving life imprisonment with all their properties confiscated? That privilege seems to be reserved only for a poor dalit of Satyam Babu's ilk!

# HC Verdict On Khairlanji: Diluting The Design Justice

09 August, 2010

While commuting the death sentence of the six convicts in the Khairlanji dalit killings case to imprisonment for 25 years, the high court did not think there was a caste angle or any planning or outraging modesty of women was involved in the crime. The whole episode reveals, in a microcosm, the character of the state vis-à-vis dalits.

The much awaited verdict of the High Court on the confirmation case (to confirm the death sentence awarded to six accused) and four appeals (two by CBI and two by the accused) was at last out on 14 July 2010. As expected, the justices AP Lavande and RC Chavan of the Nagpur bench of Bombay high court commuted the death sentence of six convicts in the Khairlanji Dalit killings case to 25 years imprisonment. Basically, the honourable court did not think it was the “rarest of the rare” case and confirmed that there was neither caste angle nor any planning involved in the crime. Expectedly, it caused flutters among Dalits, who had rejoiced at the previous verdict of the Bhandara Sessions court unprecedentedly awarding death to six of the eight accused. As in its making, Khairlanji in its dispensation through courts, past, present and possibly future-- now that it will certainly go to Supreme Court to assuage the feelings of Dalits-- will continue to show us the ugly facets of our system.

## Design Justice and Stupid Us

Khairlanji, in which a Dalit mother and her daughter and two sons were lynched by the upper caste village mob to death as the culmination of a long caste conflict was initially sought to be suppressed but it burst out into a spontaneous statewide agitation. While the government came down heavily against this agitation, labeling it as naxal induced, it had to invite CBI to investigate it and

designate the session court at Bhandara as the 'fast track' court. The state however managed not to lose its control over the outcome and appointed its prosecutor ignoring the nomination of advocate Shashi Bhushan Wahane as proposed by one organization that played a big role in exposing the incident. As it was churned out in legal proceedings, the fast track court, which was constituted with the premise of application of the Atrocity Act (Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989), came to the conclusion that there was no caste angle to the crime (and hence this Act did not apply), there was no outrage of women's modesty and it was not a premeditated crime. Thus, it painted this gory atrocity as a simple crime that gets committed in a feat of rage. However, it compensated this characterization deficit by awarding death to six of the eight accused and life imprisonment to two on the ground of their young age.

The judgement was hailed as the landmark because it was for the first time that deaths were awarded in the case of caste atrocity. The Dalit leaders had publicly celebrated it by distributing sweets. Ramdas Athawale, felicitated Ujwal Nikam, the high profile public prosecutor in the case, ignoring the fact that not many years ago, he had stood in defence of Manohar Kadam, that infamous butcher of Ramabai Nagar. Dalits, who have been observing the anniversary of Ramabai Nagar martyrdom every year, magnanimously ignored this misdemeanor of their leader. But should they have rejoiced at the broad depiction of the case as a mere crime committed in a huff? Khairlanji had a heavy context of a decade long caste conflict, for anyone to see but unfortunately the prosecution failed to present it to the court. Rapes as reported by fact finding teams was out of bounds because of the lacuna in post mortem, but the women's naked corpses cried aloud that their modesty was outraged. The prosecution failed to establish what was so obvious. It also failed to show that it was planned when the villagers knew that Surekha and Priyanka had identified the assaulters of Siddharth Gajbhiye to the police. Having taken out all winds of its sails, the court still punished as many as six



persons with death sentence. The way the case was made out, surely the death sentence was unsustainable. But Dalits celebrated it by distributing sweets, following their jubilant leaders.

### **Victim of the Caste of Mind**

The major lacuna in the khairlanji case is the denial that the atrocity was a caste atrocity. The argument that it was a result of revenge for being implicated in a case can be extended to virtually any and everything reducing the Atrocity Act to nonsense. How can anyone prove that a crime is committed because of caste? The Atrocity Act therefore had a simple definition of an atrocity as a crime committed by a non-SC/ST on an SC/ST person. Considered as the 'only act with teeth', it gets completely neutralized by courts getting into a question of its applicability. It becomes a cast of mind of the judges to see or not see a crime as a caste crime. If Khairlanji, a veritable text book case of a caste atrocity, could be rejected as a caste crime, it would be better if they scrap the Atrocity Act altogether and save Dalits from the false consciousness that the state is concerned for them.

Much acclaimed by the Dalits and equally hated by the non-Dalits, the Atrocity Act has been controversial right from the day it became applicable. While there is so much clamour about it completing 20 years, it is forgotten that it became applicable only after its rules were framed full six years after (in 1995) it was promulgated. Immediately, Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, Samajwadi Party in UP and such others elsewhere raised hue and cry against it and demanded its scrapping. The rules specify an elaborate infrastructure comprising special courts, panels of advocates to be prosecutors, monitoring machinery, etc. But as it stands, nowhere its rules are fully complied with. As a result, even the prime minister had to express concern over the low conviction rate in atrocity cases, over a much constricted base because of the reluctance to register crime under it by the police. As a matter of fact, in a factual analysis it would turn out as another ploy of the state to fool Dalits. It just seeks to see crime against SC/ST little more stringently than the IPC. One of the appeals of the CBI

challenged acquittal of all the accused from various sections of the atrocity Act, which notwithstanding the absence of serious efforts on its part, could be considered inconsequential in the face of extreme punishment of death and life imprisonment.

Khairlanji is the crime of not only the civil society but also the state. Rather one can see major role of the state actors in its making and thereafter in denying justice to the victims. The Atrocity Act significantly provides for trial and punishment of these actors. Although, all the fact finding reports highlighted the crime of the state officials in Khairlanji, this aspect remained inexplicably untouched in the prosecution case. Also, there is no attempt to challenge the acquittal of the three persons in the appeal, one of whom is said to be the close relation of a local NCP MLA.

### **Death as Deterrent**

The death penalty appears to be the sole focus yesterday of the cause of celebration and today of despair of Dalits. Besides, the primitive notion of sadistic revenge, death penalty is mistakenly taken as deterrent. It has been an established fact that death penalty does not deter crime. Almost all the developed countries have abolished it and have far lesser crime rates than those which still have death penalty. The United States is one of only three industrialized democracies that still have it; the others being Japan and South Korea. However, many states in the USA do not have death penalty. It could be revealing to see the impact of the death penalty as a deterrent by comparing the crime rates in the states practicing death penalty and those who do not within the US. The data on crime rate from 1990 to 2007 show that the states without the death penalty have had consistently lower murder rates; the percentage difference being as high as 46 percent. Morally the death penalty is just not sustainable. Death penalty in modern jurisprudence remains as an anomaly. The state just does not have authority to destroy life. If at all, only the victims of atrocity could have the moral claim to avenge the crime in a mode of war.

As an aside, it is distressing to see Dalits demanding death punishment, which empirically appears to be almost reserved for the lower castes. Some years back, a Gaya-based human rights activist and PUCL member Prabhat Kumar Shandilya had pointed out that people belonging to only Dalit and lower castes, tribals and minorities were awarded death sentence and no culprit of upper caste ever went to the gallows after the Independence; with the only exception of Nathuram Godse and Narayan Apte, the killers of Mahatma Gandhi, and lastly Dhananjay Chatterjee, who had raped and killed a 14-year-old schoolgirl in Calcutta. A veritable cent percent reservation for the lower castes and minorities to the gallows!

### **State Rewards Khairlanji**

The caste atrocities are no ordinary crime; they are backed by the caste ideology and culture. The committers of these crimes are charged with self righteousness. It does need force to shake them out of their belief system. And that force could verily be the state force. It can be the real deterrent, only if the state has the will. The track record of the state however reassures the committers of caste crimes that could go on. Khairlanji murderers were well aware of the crime they were committing. But they were reasonably sure that they would manage to escape through the labyrinthine process of law. In fact they had almost managed the cover up at local levels which could only crack under pressure of public outrage. It is still rumoured locally that the kingpins are already out. It reveals in microcosm the character of the state vis-à-vis Dalits.

Khairlanji had history of caste conflicts. Having eliminated the only assertive family of Bhotmanges, the balance two Dalit families were further subdued. The village had become a virtual police camp. Even before the disgust of the world over the brutal murders had waned, the state government this year rewarded Khairlanji with Rs 1 lakh under the states's tanta-mukta abhiyan (dispute-free campaign). The meaning is clear: the state gives a damn to Dalits!

# Mayawati's Mega Service To The Nation

13 April, 2010

Every other move of Mayawati has shattered the sanitized sensibility of middle India and left it gasping for the expression. It invariably ended, "Oh, it is too much!" Whether it is her mega memorials or her rallies, her style evokes stunning responses of this kind. The point to ponder is whether, beyond her deliberately designed-for-Dalit demeanour, there is anything essentially novel or unique. The answer would be in definite negative. Mayawati is essentially the product of the system and she represents it in full measure albeit in her inimitable way. Insofar as it appears excessive, it only helps us to see the system in its naked form.

## Recent Rally

Last year, Mayawati was embroiled in the case of a murder of Public Works Department engineer Manoj Kumar Gupta, who was brutally lynched to death in Auraiya by a BSP MLA for not fulfilling the demand for contribution to Mayawati's birth day fund. Embarrassed, she declared no collection of funds in future for her birth days. This year, it was not her own birth day but the 25th birthday of her party and 76th of her mentor Kanshiram. She pushed herself again into the eye of the storm over a mega rally organized for the occasion on March 15 at Ramabai Ambedkar Nagar in Lucknow, estimated to have cost over Rs 200 crores.

The arrangements were simply on a mind boggling scale that would make even the most extravagant nawabs of Lucknow turn up into their graves in disbelief. She was likened by the Congress to Nero playing fiddle as the communal riot in Bareilly in the preceding week had yet not subsided. The usual bias of media overflowed painting her in bad light. What stunned them on the day of the rally however was the giant garland made up of currency notes of Rs. 1000 denomination presented to her on the stage. Considering its visible length and diameter even a matriculate student could estimate its

value in the range of Rs. 10 to 20 crores, although for some strange reasons, the media and the Income Tax authorities reconciled it to much lower levels. Her close confidant and cabinet minister Naseemuddin Siddiqui expectedly declared that it was just Rs. 21 lakhs and that the money was collected by party functionaries in Lucknow.

The TV channels beamed the pictures with characteristic relish and sought to create revulsion in people by conducting motivated debate over it. They insinuated income tax investigation and possible action by the RBI for the misuse of currency notes. As the middle India's indignation peaked, Mayawati responded in her characteristic style just the day after by publicly accepting another currency garland, this time of Rs. 18 lakh, from her party workers and approvingly smiled as they declared that she would be gifted with only currency garlands in future. It was reiterated that BSP collected its funds only through such small donations from ordinary people unlike other parties who did it from big industrialists.

The event provoked media to nervously reiterate its charges against Mayawati: her autocratic style and undemocratic behaviour; her hypocrisy in speaking for Dalits but living in a super-luxuriant style, her waste of public money over mega memorials, her corruption, and so on. The ruling Congress-spokesman endorsed these charges and claimed that she would pay for all these crimes. Indeed, there are some cases against her pending in the courts but they have utterly failed to scare her. The fact remains that instead of getting scared; she has been getting more and more defiant and raising the bar to a whole new level. Rather, with her outlandish acts, she is creating scare in the minds of others as they know that notwithstanding their scale, all those charges could very well stick to each of them.

### **Talking of Democracy and Hypocrisy**

It is simply absurd to accuse some one in Indian politics of autocracy and undemocratic behaviour because our entire political culture has

been undemocratic (leader-centric) and hypocritical. As the veteran politician in late Narsimha Rao candidly wrote in his memoirs, our political culture has always been feudal at the core, where leader assumed all powers. There never existed intra party democracy in any party. This country proclaiming itself a republic, vesting sovereignty in its people, actually depicts worst kind of concentration of power in a supreme leader. Can there be bigger hypocrisy than this? It began right at the dawn of self-rule: Mahatma Gandhi, the supreme leader of the Congress chose Nehru to be the king and simply asked other contenders like Sardar Patel and Maulana Azad, to endorse his choice. Barring a few short preludes of some ones like Lal bahadur Shastri or Narsimha Rao becoming prime minister (albeit not for democratic reason), for a large part of history, India has been ruled by the Nehru dynasty thereafter. Congress set the political culture in the country which others have simply followed in varying degree.

Where does Mayawati figure in this? As a Dalit grass root worker, the feudal behaviour could not have come naturally to her. She had definitely learnt it after she reached the corridors of power. Moreover, the feudal dictatorial mode served as the strategic defence of her party against the ruling class marauders. She, and her mentor Kanshiram before her, knew the risk of the inner party democracy in a party of have-nots like Dalits. They had seen it in the destruction of the RPI, through the process of co-optation, out right buy-off or bribing of the Dalit leaders by the ruling class parties. The only solution lay in letting everyone bask in reflected glory as long as they enjoyed their confidence. For this reason they even avoided having a formal organization structure for the BSP. It is this shrewd mechanism that has saved BSP from going the RPI way. Whosoever left BSP for whatever reasons just could not rise again. The only option for people to stay on was to indulge in competitive display of devotion to the leader.

### **Squandering of Public Money**

There have been numerous public institutions, structures, statues, parks, and places dotting the entire country, which are named after Gandhi or some scion of the Nehru family. Did anybody ever raise a question of propriety about them? In what way the Tughlaquesq decision of the Congress government in Maharashtra, the most indebted state in the country, to erect the 309 feet tall statue of Shivaji in the Arabian sea, at the cost of Rs. 500 crores is different from Mayawati's Ambedkar memorial? Has our media discussed it ever with its insinuating ridicule? Kumar Ketkar who dared to question it had his house stoned in a broad day light. At least Mayawati has not resorted yet to such hooliganism. Nobody can deny that her building these memorials is not a waste of public money. The question is the ruling parties have all been doing it all the time with impunity. Why then Mayawati's projects to commemorate Dalit icons be singled out for criticism? It is again the corollary of the feudal political culture that makes the leader assume all powers do whatever he or she likes. And certainly Mayawati is not the one who set it.

There is practically no accountability of the leaders to anyone except for their voters at the end of five years. Paradoxically, such squandering of money is precisely done to fortify their positions vis-à-vis voters. The traditional ruling parties have been doing it over a longer period of time for many people in their constituency and hence it may not particularly stick out as abnormality. But no body can deny that they have not squandered public money a million times over for fortifying their private interests. The mega memorials that Mayawati is constructing constitute an important element in her schema insuring her core constituency. Just because of their magnitude or magnificence, they cannot be classed differently than what all the ruling parties did all the time.

### **Corruption**

Accusing some leader of corruption when most of them multiply their 'declared' wealth, already running into crores, sounds a wee bit

awkward. There is never a question raised by the vigilant media as to how this financial wizardry is accomplished by these social-service worthies that may shame even the most adept money managers. The progressive norm like declaration of wealth by the peoples' representative and public servants has only served to legitimize corruption of the declarants for the gullible people. Mayawati is certainly not an exception. While there is a scope for suspicion that the declaration in case of the traditional elites may constitute a fraction of their actual wealth, the newer addition to their club like Mayawati may be relatively closer to the actual. At least Mayawati paid over Rs. 26 crores income tax last year and became one of the top 20 income tax payers in the country, far ahead of richest billionaires like Mukesh and Anil Ambanis, and certainly the topmost among politicians.

True, there is a case of acquiring disproportionate assets, covering the period of 1995-2003 against her pending in the courts. This was when her declared income was paltry Rs 88.70 lacs. Now it has gone over 80 crores, almost 100 times in less than 7 years! This massive wealth is claimed to be coming from donations ordinary Dalits make on her birth day. The 1000 rupee currency notes in the garlands certainly do not come from ordinary people, most of whom may not have even seen them ever except in pictures. It may have been too embarrassing for her to swallow the lie and hence she sacked the person who disclosed its contents to the media. It is unbelievable that our institutions like income tax or banking system are not able to trace the source of these high value currency notes or for that matter all this gift business. But it may not. Can corruption be pervasive without institutions winking at it? When more than half of the GDP is stolen every year in the broad gaze of these institutions, one has to see corruption itself institutionalized. If at all, Mayawati just does it in style as she does everything else!



## **Moral Question?**

Whether it should be like this is a moral question, which is essentially asked of the larger society. If the society permits its traditional elites to behave amoral, it loses its right to question its victims if they follow suit. No one asked the question when the Indian politics right from its inception has been exploiting the communal and caste divide even at the cost of risking our existence as a nation. What moral ground can it have to question if its traditional victim wants to give it in the same coin? Mayawati has yet not demonstrated many other evils that are endemic to the system. For instance, she cannot be accused of nepotism or dynastic rule that made our democracy a laughing stock. While the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty is firmly ensconced as permanent ruler of the republic, many other dynasties have sprung up to monopolize power in their respective fiefdoms. With the imminent adoption of women's reservation, these dynasties are expected to get only stronger.

This question however could be legitimately asked by the Dalits. Just because others have been exploiting them variously, their own leaders also are not entitled to cheat them for their own aggrandizement. Political power, as a key to all problems, should have been used as such by Mayawati to lessen the woes of Dalit masses at least to the extent the system permits. However, she has adopted the easier path of intoxicating these gullible people with liquor of identity. Intoxication, trance, mesmerization do not last long; when they end and Dalits wake up to their reality, the entire mayawi castle of Mayawati would begin to crumble.

## **Greatest Service**

Notwithstanding what happened to Dalits, Mayawati has done the greatest service to the people of this country by exposing the rot of the system by stretching the things that are taken for granted to their

limits. No pontification or punditry could have explained what ails the system as effectively as her actions have done. Whatever she is accused of by the elitist media has nothing new in it in essential terms. Whether it is misusing caste in electoral strategy, or manipulating people along identities, or the feudal arrogance of power, or the corruption, or the gaudy display of money and muscle power, or the gross neglect of people, or the extraction of political rent, or the buckling of bureaucracy, or gross misuse of public money for self promotion, in short all that is seen as evil from moral high grounds have been the normal practice of our political class over the last six decades. The only difference between them and Mayawati is perhaps in the style; while they did it timidly, she has been defiantly confident about it. The very fact that the system could not touch her so far proves that she has not done anything which is not done by others or that the system is clandestinely hand in glove with her.

It is a different matter how soon the people of this country would see the rot of the system. Whenever they do they will realize the contribution of Mayawati in exposing it. Indeed, Mayawati is doing greatest service to the country. Paradoxically, if she is doing any disservice, it is only to the Dalits.

# A Moralistic Doublespeak Of Man Mohan Singh

04 May, 2009

On May 2, Dr. Man Mohan Singh, the Prime Minister of India came out in defence of the CBI's decision to withdraw a 12 year old Red Corner Notice to Interpol against Ottavio Quattrocchi in the Bofor case. On 28 April, in the midst of general election and when barely three weeks were left for the term of the UPA-government to end, CBI opened the floodgates for media to launch a sterile debate over Quattrocchi, by its controversial decision. The Congress apologetically sang a song of CBI's autonomy, knowing fully well that it cannot find perhaps a single buyer for it. The opposition rightly smelt a rat. It however failed to sound clearer. The decision smacked of the Congress being not sure to come to power. When the Congress spokesmen had done a good job of raising a smokescreen of judicial process to cover up the CBI decision, the intervention of Dr. Singh justifying it on moral grounds came as a pleasant surprise. He said in an interview with CNN-IBN, "It is not a good reflection on the Indian legal system that we harass people while the world says we have no case." Indeed, it does not behove the country of India's stature to ignore world opinion!

But one is suddenly reminded of India persistently ignoring the world opinion in the case of an Indian doctor. Unlike Dr. Singh's abstract world, here there has been a concrete world of Human Rights activists, the world of medical fraternity and the world of greatest living brains, the 22 Nobel laureates, pointing to the government of a serious moral lapse and pleading to free Dr. Binayak Sen as it did not have a case. Dr. Sen is languishing in the Raipur jail for nearly two years for a cooked up charge of being a carrier of letters from a naxalite leader, incarcerated in the Raipur jail, for which the government could not produce even a shred of evidence whatsoever. Leave apart moral outrage, he is not being given medical treatment for his heart ailment, something basic that anybody is legally due.

Binayak Sen, a gold medalist from the prestigious Vellore Medical College, one who ignored all lures of luxurious life and joined Shankar Guha Niyogi to set up Chhattisgarh Mukti Morcha's Shaheed Hospital for tribals and workers, the cofounder of Rupantar, a community-based NGO that trained community health workers in villages, a celebrated authority on community health, and the General Secretary of one of the respected civil rights organization- PUCL, Chhattisgarh, was arrested under one of India's most draconian laws, the Chhattisgarh Special Public Security Act on 14 May 2007. His bail application was dismissed twice, both times at the very outset, by the High Court of Chhattisgarh and by the Supreme Court of India, without ever considering the merits of the case.

His trial commenced on 30 April 2008. Not one of the 64 witnesses examined by the Prosecution has provided any legally admissible evidence to support the accusations in the charge-sheet. Even the jail officials, the Superintendent and the Jailer, who were called as witnesses by the Prosecution, have ruled out the possibility of Dr. Sen carrying letters from Narayan Sanyal, a senior Maoist leader, out of the high security Raipur Jail. Recently, Binayak Sen, with a history of heart ailment, was examined by a doctor appointed by the court, who recommended that Sen should be sent to CMC Vellore for heart treatment. A nationwide campaign to save his life was carried out but it failed to get Sen required medical aid. From 16 March, prominent people from all over the country began offering satyagraha on every Monday at the Raipur Jail for Dr. Sen's release. The State coolly arrests the satyagrahis but does not budge on the issue of his release.

It is by now clear that the government punished Sen for speaking out against the Salwa Judum, the State sponsored peoples' militia that has killed thousands of poor tribal, ostensibly to clear the forest lands to be given to the corporates. Salwa Judum stands exposed today as the dark spot on our constitutional working. If anyone needs to be punished for this crime against the Constitution, it is the State government and people who mooted this evil idea.

There have been continuous agitations, numerous petitions over the last two years, by distinguished individuals as well as collectives, sent to the President, Prime Minister and other constitutional authorities against unjust incarceration of Binayak Sen. But it has failed to produce even a slightest sense of guilt or moral outrage that Quattrocchi's case did in any of them.

One would argue that these cases are not comparable. Obviously, they are not. The first is the case of a saintly doctor, who dedicatedly served and spoke for the poorest of our countrymen for over last three decades. The second is the case of a highly connected jet setting Italian businessman who was sought for criminal charges for acting as a conduit for Rs. 64 crores bribes in the Bofors scandal. As it stands, there is no case against Dr. Sen. The government still resists every attempt to grant him a bail or even a medical treatment. In Quattrocchi's case there is a reasonable evidence in the form of two bank accounts unearthed by Interpol bearing nos. 5A5151516M and 5A5151516L, held by Quattrocchi and his wife Maria with the BSI AG bank, London, containing Euros 3 million and \$1 million, which was considered to be "curiously large savings for a salaried executive." There is a history of government acting with some kind of vendetta against Dr. Sen. Whereas the history of the Bofors case reveals firstly the reluctance of the government to book Quattrocchi and thereafter deliberate mishandling of the case by its agencies. The contrast is indeed endless.

No body needs to grudge a clean chit being given to Quattrocchi. After all, Bofors, as Congress described it, is a dead horse. It has only served to fool the people over two decades at their own cost. It had better be given a happy burial than spending money on all pretentious pursuit. We do not have dearth of scandals to demonstrate our investigative and judicial prowess. But why this moralistic doublespeak of invoking the world opinion to save a foreigner accused of taking away our money and ignoring it when it comes to your own man, just because he chose to speak for the poor and oppressed?

Binayak Sen's case ought to nibble at our national conscience for long time to come!

# Enveloped In The Peace Of The Dead

07 September, 2010

Dazed by its satirical brilliance, the first thought that crossed my mind as I got up from my seat after watching Peepli Live, this debut film of a young ex-TV journalist, is why even such a powerful projection of the rot in the system fails to enrage people. It is by no means the first film to mirror it; right from the Bollywood potboilers, which perhaps communicate to larger audience than Peepli-like 'unentertaining' films, such mirroring of horrific reality of India, has been happening. And films are not the only medium to do that: conscientious writers, poets, singers, playwrights and numerous civil society movements have been doing the job of awakening people. But all these attempts are failing to shake the people from their middle class reveries.

## A Pathetic Piece of India

Peepli is anchored in the plight of two brothers – Natha and Budhia, who are on the verge of losing their land, their only source of livelihood, due to an unpaid loan from a bank. They contemplate an option of suicide as insinuated by a local politician in hope that it would fetch the family Rs 1 lakh as compensation from the government. It certainly does not represent the mode in which nearly 2 lakh farmers committed suicide since 1997 but still captures the very essence of the contemporary rural crisis that for a paltry sum of a few thousand rupees, which could be casually spent by urban rich over a dinner or a night stay, farmers have to resort to this horrific end. The genre of the film being satire, it does not at all undermine the importance of this issue of farmers' suicide, much less ridicule it. It just uses it as a backdrop to expose the bigger rot in the system. It is unfortunate therefore that a controversy was created about the film by the Vidarbha Jan Andolan, which has been otherwise doing a good work in exposing this issue from its epicentre.

While Natha, prodded by his elder brother Budhia to commit suicide for the sake of the family, is still in the state of bewilderment, the news spreads around. Being election time in the region a reluctant reporter of a local news paper stumbles upon it and reports it. The news creates a sensation in the political arena and before it could be brushed under the carpet, comes an avalanche of TV channels to the village and there begins a media circus as each one vies with other to sensationalize the issue to increase its TRP (Target Rating Point, a measure of its reach to the target audience that fetch advertising revenue, the mainstay of media). The issue gets completely sidetracked by the mutually reinforcing dynamics of politics and media. The film effectively exposes how contemptuous the state is towards the plight of people: the collector sending Natha a bare 'lal bahadur' (a hand pump under some scheme named after Lal Bahadur Shastri) without any concern that it would be a liability than an asset to him; the centre and state playing usual ping pong to score one-upmanship and at the same time shirking their responsibility; not finding a single scheme in the plethora of schemes to really help a Natha-like farmer in distress the centre instituting a new scheme in the form of a Natha Card, which paradoxically Natha himself would not be qualified to get. The media, unashamedly TRP (read business) driven, is devoid of any sensitivity to the human tragedy. A lone sensitive journalist, who laments media indifference to the death of a labourer in the same village, is shown dying. Eventually, when the entire tamasha ends abruptly with the assumed accidental death of Natha, he is shown at a construction site in Mumbai with the same helplessness tucked to his bosom.

### **A Grand System Failure**

Peepli depicts a grand failure of our system as far as common masses are concerned. Sixty years ago, our founding fathers had laid the foundation of the system in the form of the Constitution which, whatever its other features, had a chapter on directive principles of state policy, which provided a blue print for realizing the vision reflected by its preamble. That vision was to "constitute India into a



sovereign socialist secular democratic republic, and to secure to all its citizens: justice, social, economic and political; liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; equality of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation. Where do we find ourselves vis-à-vis it today? If Peepli truly represented India, we have surely done well to negate it. On every parameter of the preamble, anyone can easily assess, our progress represents an antithesis of what India was meant to be.

The greatest excuse for all failures as given by our rulers is our democracy as though it was something extraneous to our vision. Actually, this delusion is at the root of our failure on most counts. The basic premise of Indian democracy is sovereignty of people, which is actualized through their representatives elected through a great ritual of elections. Our sole claim to democracy is that we have observed this ritual largely uninterruptedly over the last six decades. But in terms of contents, are we really a democracy? To what extent our elected representatives represent Nathas and Budhias of Peepli? When they approach them they are shooed away; indicate them an option of suicide, and later threaten that Natha had to die. The disconnect between people and their representatives has grown over the years. A cursory glance at their class profile reveals it all: There are as many as 315 crorepatris out of 543 MPs in the current Lok Sabha up from 154, from the previous one, with approximate distribution in proportion to their strength across political parties. The average asset of the 304 re-contesting MPs in 2009 election grew from Rs. 1.9 crores in 2004 to 4.8 crores and that for the elected 154 MPs from 2.2 crores to 6.0 crores, a growth of nearly three hundred percent. The entire political power is monopolized by a few thousand families in the country of 1.3 billion people, who masquerade as different parties but represent the ruling class interests. People have been left with no real choice, either in the ritual of elections or thereafter. It is therefore that when these MPs got themselves a raise of threefold salary recently, people just watched with muted disbelief.

It is not the matter of a few lakh of rupees, but the utter absence of accountability in the system, reflected in this process is what is noteworthy. The rot in the political system inevitably shows up in other spheres and necessarily on every possible developmental parameter, whether absolute or relative.

### **‘Consumerocracy’ over Democracy**

The rot is accentuated by the media, which is rightly focused in Peepli. Gone are the days, it was called the fourth estate by the likes of Thomas Carlyle or Edmund Burke, a la conscious keeper of the nation; media is a pure business today but functions in far more insidious a manner than even a business. Its new offshoot, the electronic media, becomes far more perilous insofar as it can mould the world as it pleases. Unlike the press, which can present kaleidoscopic world, the electronic media has intrinsically very narrow focus which can be potentially content rich but at the cost of exclusion of many other happenings. Natha in Peepli becomes an obsession of the media circus, but Hori Mahato (intelligently named after the immortal character from Munshi Premchand’s ‘Godaan,’ the classic tale of exploitation of farmers), that sinewy man who dug up earth from his barren piece of land entire day to sell it at the nearby brick kiln so as to earn his daily bread, does not attract its attention even after he dies of hunger. Just because it does not fit in the theory of attracting eyeballs.

The business model of media is based on target audience that has purchasing power. It thus intrinsically valorizes not democracy of ‘one vote, one value’ kind but consumerocracy of ‘one currency note, one value’. Barring the fanciful concern for the ‘bottom of the pyramid’, mostly the 77 per cent population earning less than Rs 20 a day is naturally excluded from it. The entire game gets played up with balance 23 percent, the so called middle and high class of this country. As a matter of fact, Nancy Birdsall’s more scientific study dismisses the existence of any such middle class in India. She could not find anyone earning 10 Dollars a day to qualify for being

middleclass as per her international definition, after knocking out the top 5 percent as rich. Nonetheless, no Indian considers himself below middleclass unless he sleeps on road and begs for food. This change in aspiration has particularly, come in during the last two decades of neoliberalism, which has lit the fire of consumption in all. Neoliberalism, as an ideology pulverizes society into individuals and preaches them to compete for their selfish ends. These discrete individuals with ever increasing appetite for more and more consumption do not have time to ponder over Nathas of this world or the odds of the system until they affect their own selves. They have interests in preserving the status quo as it provides them a sense of security in the fast paced change around. That is why we do not see mass upsurge in support of incipient resistance struggles waged by some people in such odd times.

### **Peace of the Dead**

The neoliberal obsession of the rulers for GDP growth is enriching a few and pauperizing the vast masses for whom the crisis of living has intensified through galloping unemployment, insecurity, inflation, fascization of polity, pervasive corruption, and naked loot of neocolonial predators. The stink of the rotting system comes out with such disturbing frequency through various scams and corruption scandals that our nostrils got used to it. Nothing ever happens in the country to those who have pelf and power, while millions get pushed to the margins like Natha of Peepli, enveloped in peace of the Dead!

# 50 Years Of Maharashtra: Shame Or Celebration

11 May, 2010

On May 1, Maharashtra completes 50 years of statehood. It would be the moment of jingoist celebrations orchestrated by politicians and meekly joined by gullible Marathi masses. Maharashtra, as it has in its name itself, has some narcissist streak, a kind of megalomania. It called itself the land of Phule - Ambedkar, intrinsically progressive therefore, and monopolized the legacy of these two social revolutionaries. It always imagined itself to be ahead of all the states even in the face of contrary evidence. Whether it is innocence of people or the trickery of their leaders, Maharashtra always seemed to be in love with itself. The golden jubilee will certainly take the pitch of self glory to a crescendo. Unfortunately, in it will be drowned all possibilities of introspection over its accomplishments vis-à-vis the aspirations of the movement that brought it into being.

## **Aspirations of socialist Maharashtra**

Maharashtra was born out of the mass struggle for a linguist state like any other but in its course it had gained unusual radical tinge that resonated in a slogan of 'Samyukta Maharashtra, socialist Maharashtra'. Unrealistic though, the movement in its conclusive phase was guided by this slogan. The workers, peasants, Dalits, and minorities who came together and constituted the support base of this movement, had hoped that the new state of Maharashtra will at least be sensitive to their plight, work for its alleviation. Leave apart socialism, it will at least march in the direction of thwarting the growing inequality around them. Inspired by such a hope 106 of them had embraced martyrdom. However, the new ruling class that sprung up in their dream state, their own in appearance, did not take much time to belie their hopes and bury their aspirations. They entombed the latter for ever into a memorial erected at the place where the martyrs were felled by the bullets of the then chief minister

Morarji Desai. It still stays there in the anachronistic company of a colonial structure called flora fountain, accompanied by another memorial created by the Shiv Sena led BMC over the scarce open spaces around in 1990s. It no more reminds Maharashtrians what their Maharashtra was all about because it is fully capitalized by the Shiv Sena and its offspring Maharashtra Navnirman Sena to promote their parochial agenda. No one even suspects that this false pride about Marathi is clean antithesis of the aspirations of the Martyrs who have been memorialized there.

The idea of Maharashtra was not based on Marathi parochialism. Of all the movements for linguistic state, the movement for united Maharashtra, being the last in the series and located in the capitalist centre of Mumbai had developed an ostensible radical vision of its future. Although the communist and socialist leadership articulated it in terms of socialism, it definitely meant that the new state would be in favour of workers, farmers, Dalits and minorities. Marathi merely provided socio-cultural glue for carving out such a model state. Much of the Marathi speaking province presented a picture of non-Marathi capitalists and businessmen exploiting the Marathi workers and farmers. Marathi in this context became ready ammunition in the class struggle between capitalists and workers. It never meant to identify friends and foes. Maharashtra was to be the assurance to all workers about their security from the marauding capitalists and businessmen irrespective of what language they spoke or where they came from. What it is reduced to by the Thackerays and other politicians is its antithesis. Maharashtra became the threat to non-Marathi workers, false security to Marathi people and protected jungle for the capitalist beasts to prey upon all. It is beyond symbolism that the Parel-Lalbaug area of Mumbai, the den of the textile workers, who played vanguard role in the united Maharashtra movement, is transformed into the area of ultra rich, displacing and decimating the entire working class.

**Maharashtra of Phule-Ambedkar**

It is true that the first salvos against the decadent caste system were fired in Maharashtra. There could be several reasons for that but one of which was the severity of caste oppression in the state. The lower castes have struggled against this oppression and gave a lead to the entire country, thanks to the towering leadership of Mahatma Phule and Babasaheb Ambedkar. These castes have made significant progress during these 50 years. Despite this, Maharashtra has failed to show any progressive edge over others. It has a dubious distinction of first devising the cooptation strategy to debilitate the post-Ambedkar Dalit movement in its promising phase. It was Yashwantrao Chavan trying it out on none other than Dadasaheb Gaikwad. The process resulted in splintering Dalit movement. The strategy was taken to its most unscrupulous level by the prodigy of Chavan, Sharad Pawar, which has almost decimated the Dalit movement in the state.

Weakening of the Dalit movement has certainly been the major cause behind the growing atrocities on Dalits. While swearing by self-proclaimed progressivism, Maharashtra always had its fair share of atrocities on Dalits. In 2008, there were 1192 cognizable crimes against Dalits (SC) in Maharashtra which ranked 10 among the states and union territories in terms of its percentage share in the country. Not alone in statistical terms, Maharashtra also had its fair share in gory incidents of atrocities like Khairlanji. While the entire world was aghast at Khairlanji, similar incidents of violent crimes against Dalits kept on happening in the state unabated.

Going through the names of 106 martyrs, one can clearly see that all of them were not Marathi; they typically represented the cosmopolitan character of Mumbai. There were several non-Marathis, Christians and notably at least three Muslims among them. One feels sorry to see Maharashtra forgetting their contribution and treating them as traitors. Maharashtra figures very prominently in the list of post-1960 communal riots in the country. Not only Bhiwandi and Malegaon, which have been synonymous with communal strife, but the unlikely places such as Sholapur, Aurangabad, Jalgaon and

Mumbai itself have been tarnished by the repeated anti-Muslim riots. Maharashtra never felt the need to rethink its communal pedigree in the birth place of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh or a home to the assassin of Gandhi. It has been as prone to anti-Muslim riots as ever. According to the Police data, Maharashtra has witnessed on an average one communal riot in about every 20 days during the last five years. When Abhinav Bharat rioters were found behind the blasts at Malegaon, and Nanded, and were suspected in many others, Maharashtra again shocked the world with its communal prowess.

### **Pro-People Development**

The socialist rhetoric of the united Maharashtra movement was actually meant decentralization of development away from Mumbai-Pune belt so that its gains would spread to wider Marathi population thus reducing prevailing inequality. Nothing of that kind happened and the entire development remained confined to this small belt as before. Maharashtra minus this belt still compares well with the most backward parts of the country. Maharashtra remains one of the most unequal states in the country. Inequality in terms of per capita consumption expenditure for Haryana, Maharashtra and Punjab, the top three states in terms of per capita income, shows Maharashtra to be the most unequal state with Gini coefficient of 0.345 as against that for Haryana and Punjab at 0.285 and 0.290 respectively. The Gini coefficients for the states with low per capita income such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar at 0.327 and 0.318 respectively, also were far lower than that of Maharashtra.

The majority of Maharashtrians were engaged in agriculture but remained neglected at the hands of ruling classes. In terms of increase in irrigated area Maharashtra scored the least with only 10.78 per cent as against Gujarat with 22 per cent followed by Tamil Nadu with 21 per cent. For the past decade, due to its enthusiastic adoption of neoliberal policies, it has earned itself a dubious distinction with maximum farmers' suicides. According to official count more than 50,000 farmers committed suicide in Maharashtra. No other State

comes close to that total. This means that of the roughly 1.5 lakh farmers who killed themselves across the country in that period, almost every third one was from Maharashtra. According to a Report of Prof. K. Nagraj of Madras Institute of Development Studies, Chennai the General Suicide Rate (GSR) (overall suicides per 1 lakh population) in the country between 1997 and 2005 was 10.6, and the Farmers Suicide Rate (FSR) was 12.9. As against this, Maharashtra clocked GSR of 15.1 and FSR of 29.9, a whopping increase of over 40 and 131 per cent over the country.

Much of the pro-people development gets reflected in the Human Development Index. The sorry state of Maharashtra is that almost 12 of its 35 districts figure in the 100 lowest HDI districts of the country. No district of other state in the developed category figures in this list. Some districts in Vidarbha and Marathwada have lower HDI than that of backward districts of Orissa and Jharkhand. The developmental state of Maharashtra perhaps may be better gauged in comparison with Orissa on HDI: whereas 53 per cent districts of Orissa are below the HDI for India, 68 per cent districts of Maharashtra fall under that category. In terms of proportion of people below the poverty line, Maharashtra is third from the bottom, after Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. If one looked at rural and urban poverty separately, rural poverty ratio is probably among the worst in the country. The state economic survey, 2010 admits that the poverty ratio in the state is 30.7%, 3.2% more than the all-India (27.5%) figure. Tamil Nadu and West Bengal had the same level of poverty figures during 1993-94 as Maharashtra, but by 2004-05 their poverty ratios slid much lower than that of Maharashtra, it said.

### **Facilitating Global Capital**

Maharashtra had huge historical advantage over other states because of its inheritance of colonial infrastructure. But, during the recent years it appears to be squandering it. Gujarat, its twin state, has almost left it behind on many parameters. The decennial growth of the State GDP of Gujarat (181.10 per cent) has been much better



than Maharashtra's (160.49 per cent). However, Maharashtra still scores best on parameters marking neoliberal reforms and aspires to become a 'global state'. It prides on being on top in terms of GDP contribution, FDI friendliness, acquisition of huge agricultural lands through MIDC and facilitating capitalists to do so themselves for the maximum number of SEZs nominated within the state. In the name of creating infrastructure for the rich, it has indulged in unprecedented fiscal profligacy and has become the most indebted state. The public debt of Maharashtra is expected to increase to Rs 1,85,801 crore during 2009-10. CAG in its report for the year ended March 2005 itself, when the debt was just 1.21 lakh crore, had observed that the state with ever increasing ratio of fiscal liabilities to gross state domestic product (GSDP) at 34% together with a large revenue deficit, was getting into a debt trap.

But that beside the point, when the project is to make it a global state! The problem is to locate masses of common Maharashtrians in this global schema.

# Bhopal: Trivializing The Tragedy

24 June, 2010

Swaminathan S Ankalesaria Aiyar crudely trivialized Bhopal showing it as a minor killer than the Mumbai rail system. Quipping in his column in the Times of India of 13 June he rightly noted that we shout at the sensational but take many other things for granted. However, as the seasoned free-market columnist, he has not left his point unmade that the outpour of the anger against the Union Carbide was misplaced, that it was just a negligent act of some operative in a shutdown plant, that the people like Anderson or Keshub Mahindra are no more responsible for it than president Pratibha Patil is for some railway accident, and such others. His exposure of pervasive callousness and unaccountability of the Indian polity then are just an alibi, as it sells well with the middle classes; his core point was to make out Bhopal as an ordinary accident which was not worth raising a hue and cry about.

The facts of Bhopal are so outrageous that this world's worst industrial disaster will also be the biggest trade of the dead and dying by the tricksters in history. The foreclosed judgement treating it just as a 'road accident', and shameful release of the culprits on Rs. 25000 bail was so grievous that it should have set the entire country afire. Instead, it unleashed all kinds of debates, mainly mediated by media that has been further trivializing the major tragedy of the last century.

## Deaths by Designs

Bhopal was not an accident; it was the design killer of Union Carbide (India) (UCI). In the din over Anderson's extradition, its deficiency galore in design got completely overlooked. Many experts have attributed them to UCI's zeal to cut capital expenditure. For instance, water curtains meant to contain lethal methyl isocyanate (MIC) leak could reach only a height of 10-15 meters whereas the MIC vents were at 33 meters high. The vent scrubbers meant for neutralizing

MIC were underprovided by a factor of six. The safety system in such a highly hazardous industry should be self-switching but in Bhopal it was manual. The low level of instrumentation did not have any redundancy (if one fails other takes over). Considering the consequences, there should have been additional safety system as in Bayer plants, where MIC vented into a nearby area capable of flooding with water. An additional provision for flaring MIC from the top of the vent scrubber should also have been provided. But all these were deliberately ignored in the design just for the sake of profits.

Many of the design lacunae can be overcome by robust operational and maintenance system. But in the UCI plant, the design lacunae were rather amplified by poor operational and maintenance system. A US team that visited Bhopal in 1982 had pointed out number of safety deficiencies in the plant, but no corrective measures were taken by the UCI management. Some of the major lacunae identified in relation with MIC were manual control for filling of the MIC tank with no instrumentation backup, which created a possibility of accidental overfilling; there was no fixed water spray system for fire protection or vapour dispersion in the MIC operation area; there were several conditions in the operation of the unit that presented a serious potential for sizable releases of toxic materials; filter cleaning operations of the MIC pipes were performed without slip binding of process lines, which could create serious exposures due to leaking valves; long pressure gauge inlet lines, without vents, could result in the release of MIC when the gauge were replaced, due to the inability to evacuate them safely.

After the plant was commissioned, many new safety devices/systems (new monitoring system comprising sensors for pressure, temperature, volume, flow, gas detection) became available but the management on cost cutting spree never considered them. Automatic warning system that triggered by the rapid rise of pressures in the MIC tank, an automatic switching mechanism for the scrubbers, a safety interlock arrangement to prevent the operation of the plant if

the scrubber and/or refrigeration unit were disconnected, an automatic water spraying system linked to gas detection, etc. could have been easily installed to overcome initial design deficiency. Surprisingly, the UCI plant did not have even a gas detection system and enough breathing masks. Other operational processes such as regular inspection of critical components, detailed safety analysis exercises, etc. were conspicuous with their absence. Would Aiyar still call it just an accident?

### **Accomplices in the Crime**

The Government that approved setting up the plant without vetting technology, carrying out hazard and operability analyses, environment impact assessment, examining pollution aspects is certainly an accomplice in the crime. The plant was built very close to the highly populated areas. Contrary to Aiyar's contention, the railway station, the bus station, the old secretariat, hospitals and even the lake that supplies drinking water to Bhopal city are all close to the plant. During 1971-81 Bhopal's population grew by almost 75 per cent. Like any similar city, squatter settlements developed in the vicinity of the UCI plant. The government did not do anything to prevent it and rather legalized them in 1983. After the plant became operational in 1969 the regulatory machinery of the government could have easily noticed many of the wrongs noted above but it did not. UCI had cut corners even in training of manpower and even reduced it in numbers. There was a move to shift the plant in 1976 but the chief minister Arjun Singh had stalled it saying that there was no risk. UCI was given permission to expand its capacity in 1979. The spate of accidents in the plant, number of press reports in October 1982 and June 1984, creating alarm about the impending risk could shake the government out of its slumber but it was not to be.

When the tragedy struck, the government's ineptitude came to limelight. Even after 5000 people dropped dead within few hours it failed to have its emergency meeting until the next day. It did little in

evacuating people, in providing treatment. As a matter of fact nobody knew the line of treatment for several days because the UCC and UCI had allegedly kept it secret not to reveal the risk of their operations. The Anderson episode has too shamefully revealed the sale out of our governments, both state as well as the centre, to hide. Then followed a series of intrigues and treacheries. Bringing the case from the US court to India, government assuming representation of the victims in the legal case, Supreme Court bench headed by the then chief justice A.H. Ahmadi mysteriously deciding that the world's worst industrial accident was nothing more than 'a road accident' when the lower court in Bhopal was to hear the case, the inexplicable settlement at a paltry 480 million dollars as against government's own claim of 3.3 billion dollars on behalf of the victims, dragging the almost open and shut case for a quarter of a century, and so on. At every stage the tragedy was trivialized and the victims betrayed.

When in the wake of such political deceptions and judicial disasters, the court verdict came on – June 2010, although sans surprise, it provoked nationwide outrage. The media sensationalized the issue around Anderson and successfully sidetracked the roles of scores of our own people who facilitated his ilk to play havoc on in our country. Who is guiltier? Anderson, who with a sense of some responsibility had come all the way from the US to the accident site or our own rulers, who after arresting him treated him like a VIP and provided their own plane to escape from the country?

### **GoM Cover Up**

When all leads began pointing to Rajiv Gandhi as responsible for Anderson's escape, the government constituted the Group of Ministers (GoM) to thwart the political build up against itself. Finance Minister P. Chidambaram, who lobbied, along with Kamal Nath, Montek Singh Ahluwalia and Ronen Sen, on behalf of Dow Chemicals, the company that bought Carbide, for absolving them from latter's liabilities. Jairam Ramesh, the big mouth minister of environment, who recently blurted out in Bhopal, "I held the toxic

waste in my hand. I am still alive and not coughing”, is also a member of the GoM. Every member of this GoM has some history of betraying the interests of the Bhopal victims. The government always resorts to throwing crumbs to people to stave off its crisis, which is what the GoM is expected to do. As per media reports, it has come out with a recommendation for huge financial package for compensation, site remediation, and rehabilitation and to make fresh attempt for extradition of Anderson and a curative petition in the Supreme Court against dilution of charges against the accused in the case. All this just to say that Anderson’s escape was a ‘system failure’ and had nothing to do with Rajiv Gandhi! As for the Bhopal victims, they know from experience that nothing would come out of it, excepting for confusing the issues further.

Whether it benefits the victims or not, the GoM package would expend public funds to pay for private sins as per the neoliberal code of public-private partnership. This may facilitate the passage of the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Bill, which seeks to put a cap of Rs. 500 crores on liabilities of nuclear plant operators, the rest to be borne by the public. Instead of taking lessons from Bhopal tragedy, our neoliberalist rulers have used it to reassure global capitalists that they can take away all profits leaving losses to be borne by poor Indians.

If the government has any shame, it would possibly enact a special law to expeditiously try all the guilty of Bhopal and rehabilitate all victims with human dignity and with a sense of recompense for its wrong doing for 25 years. The guilty of Bhopal are not only Andersons, Mahindras and Gokhales, but also include hundreds of its own bureaucrats and ministers who have variously contributed to this tragedy. There is no question of Indian people bearing any liability; it should recover every penny from the criminals. Anything else, GoM show included, amounts to trivializing this grave tragedy and insulting its victims!

# One More Reservation

08 April, 2010

It is very symbolic that the ire of people built up against price rise all over the country was so easily punctured by the government with the Women's Reservation Bill. Unlike earlier times in its tumultuous history of 14 years, it has already been passed in the Rajya Sabha and could well be passed in the Lok Sabha but for the opposition of Yadavs and Mayawati. The UPA has decided to table it in the next session, perhaps to use it to overcome another crisis. Reservation in this country has proved to be a potent weapon in the hands of ruling classes to raise public passion and control political barometer. Indeed it is strategic that UPA holds on to it as long as possible. Because if it is passed and made into law, it will lose a weapon in hand until it creates another reservation bill. Of course, there is no dearth of demands for reservation; going by the trend they may rather outlive the polity.

## From an Exception to Proliferation

The provision of reservation came as an exception to the fundamental right to equality in favour of the scheduled castes (SCs), who suffered deep entrenched social prejudice against them and the scheduled tribes (STs), who were physically detached from the mainstream society and potentially faced the same fate as the scheduled castes. Prejudice was such that no matter what attributes they possessed, the society would not accept them anywhere other than where they were traditionally supposed to be. The reservations to the SCs, as a matter of fact had come through the colonial times and it was just a matter of continuation of what already existed post independence. To that was added the STs. The Constitution makers failed to attribute this exception to the disability of the Indian society to treat its own people equal and vaguely associated it with backwardness of these communities. Had it done so, the reservation would have had self terminating logic: motivating the larger society to do away this

disability and hence the reservation itself at the earliest possible time. Unfortunately, the way it is couched, has made the reservations self-perpetuating.

Apart from the reservations to the SCs and STs, the Constitution empowered the state to make special provisions for the advancement of the classes which are 'socially and educationally backward'. The special measures do not necessarily mean replication of the quota system as for the SCs and STs. But its default meaning was taken as such by politicians to forge reservation into a political weapon to manipulate people. The cardinal criterion for reservation in a country like India characterized by pervasive backwardness can only be the insurmountable social prejudice, which leaves no other viable option than an exceptional measure such as the countervailing force of the state to counter it. Quota verily represents that force. This criterion cannot be diluted to backwardness. The special measures to be taken for others to remove the ubiquitous backwardness could well be to ensure that the few traditional elites do not get further enriched by the developmental investments of the states at the cost of multitude of masses. Despite reservation galore, this is precisely what has not happened in India. The rich have been getting richer and the poor poorer.

With huge empowerment of the landed middle castes as a result of the post-independence Nehruvian modernist project comprising land reforms and the green revolution, among others, drastically changed the course of politics in the country. The elite of these amorphous middle castes taking advantage of the caste ties and the electoral system consolidated themselves to wield enormous economic, social and political power and threatened the monopoly of the traditional ruling castes. The phenomena of emergence of regional parties from mid 1960s and inauguration of coalition era from mid 1970s is manifestation of this process. The main plank of their consolidation was the rhetoric against the upper castes and the hatred for Dalits, perceived as unduly pampered with reservation. The elites of the BCs could skillfully transform the popular grudge against reservations for



the SCs and STs into the passion for their extension to other backward castes, thus setting into motion the competitive backwardness to claim reservation.

The Mandal reservations to the BCs eventually opened the pandora's box. Now, the reservations are naturally being demanded by all conceivable categories. Muslims are closer to getting it, thanks to the Sachar committee recommendations. Dalit Christians should not be very far. There is a demand for reservations to poor among the upper castes and of course the incipient demands for splitting the quota according to sub castes and sub sub-castes. With increasing crisis for people, reservation projected as panacea is bound to get proliferated beyond limits.

### **Have Reservations Really Worked?**

Before extension of this exceptional principle to all and sundry, the responsible polity would evaluate whether it has served the original purpose in its prototype form in the case of SCs and STs. If we objectively look at the evidence, one could definitely say that it has catalyzed huge spread of education among these communities and caused significant socio-economic development through the employment in government and public sector. Although extremely limited in its potential, its motivational impact has been tremendous. Notwithstanding these positive aspects, like any other developmental scheme without remedial mechanism, it has accentuated inequality among these castes. The people (and the castes) with first movers advantage increasingly monopolized its benefits and left the rest relatively poorer. While the beneficiaries are individuals or their families, with the ruling idiom of caste, it engendered feelings of resentment against the beneficiary castes, and provided fodder for the vested interests to further divide these castes.

This flaw in the policy could be easily plugged by bringing in a non-caste criterion of a family unit. The prospective reservation should be considered applicable to the families, which have not yet availed of

reservation. (see my article Reservation within Reservation, EPW --). This is simple and doable solution but it would not be accepted by the political class as it takes away caste, which has been their golden goose.

In addition, there is political reservation which is ignorantly mixed up with the reservation in education and employment available to the SCs and STs. It came from the Poona Pact between Gandhi and Ambedkar in 1932 as a compromise to do away the grant of separate electorates in the Communal Award of Ramsay McDonald. At the time of its incorporation into the Constitution, Ambedkar himself was not sure about its efficacy and wanted it only for 10 years. However, this reservation has been getting unanimously extended before it is due to expire by the ruling class parties. From this broad evidence also one could surmise who the real beneficiaries of this reservation are. But, even beyond this, one could find out whether it has benefitted the Dalits masses for whom it was meant. The answer is in definite negative. Late Kanshiram summarized his assessment of this policy in his pamphlet, 'chamcha yug' (the era of stooges). It produced totally contrary result to what was perhaps intended. Instead of creating a proportionate representation of Dalits in the legislative bodies, it has completely decimated their representation by producing stooges out of Dalit politicians. While in numbers, this reservation, unlike others, has been always fully implemented; it has never meant even a feeble voice of Dalits in legislature. The so called Dalit representatives have been always subservient to their ruling class upper caste bosses to whom they owed their existence. It only created a political class among Dalits, which fattens itself on the political rent derived from the ruling classes.

### **Reservation to Women**

The current bill purporting to give 33 percent reservation to women in state legislatures and Lok Sabha is also destined to be counterproductive in a much bigger measure. There are no two opinions that women who hold up half the sky are short-shrifted in

the male dominated world and that they should rightfully own up at least half of the world. There is no dispute about their suffering myriad forms of discriminations and atrocities: As children, they are discriminated in food, health, education; as adult women they are discriminated in choice of livelihood, wages, and suffer physical abuse and rape. There cannot be any controversy therefore about the need to stop injustice on them and restore what is rightfully theirs but unjustly denied to them. The issue is about the way of doing it.

Firstly, women are a very generic and broad category, comprising castes, classes, races, and communities of all kinds. Despite the history of over 150 years of women's movement, they have not achieved a coherent voice and rather showed up as inevitable splintering in recent years. There is nothing common for instance between an urban upper caste woman and a typical Dalit woman in a village. The former though suffering subtle discrimination in patriarchal society enjoys enormous social power whereas the latter is triple-oppressed, as being poor, Dalit and a woman. The mainstream concept of women's liberation therefore is alien to Dalit women. As a reaction, they have been observing their women's liberation Day on 25th December, (instead of 8th March) the day the Manusmriti was burnt during the Mahad conference. Its stance is not against men but against the mainstream women's movement that seeks to overlook the oppression of majority women. There is a tendency seen in even other caste and community groups to articulate their dissent against the mainstream women's movement.

Secondly, the idea of reservation has been problematic with regard to its professed objective but certainly useful to politicians. Reservation by design promotes the interests of the better placed ones among the target population. As a result, while a small section of the population progresses, the rest is left behind. At the time when reservation was conceived for the SCs and STs, these considerations were not material simply because there was no visible elite among them. Whosoever came up was to be a role model for the rest and was supposed to represent their interests. Now that the second and third generations

of beneficiary Dalits are around, the evils of reservation system have surfaced clearly. The demand for categorization articulated by Madiga Dandora may not be maintainable in many ways but cannot simultaneously be dismissed as baseless or motivated. The point is that it basically bares the limitation of reservation policy. Since reservation for the SCs and STs is premised on the social prejudice, its outright abolition is out of question in view of these prejudices still visible, but there is certainly a case for plugging their obvious lacunae.

### **Politics behind Progressive Veneer**

The situation at the time of instituting first reservation no more exists for any segment of population, least with women today. The all pervasive clamor for reservation today can be considered as symptomatic of our unscrupulous politics. The proposed women's reservation is also not beyond it. It has extended its hands beyond castes and communities to a new terrain of gender. Ever since, the rise of the middle castes ushering in the coalition era of governance, our traditional ruling classes, innured as they are to monopoly power, have been uncomfortable. While other reservation issues can be raked up, they have small potential and uncertain outcome. However, if they could bring in vast population such as women's, under the purview of reservation, they could hope to cross the coalition barrier. Women's reservation bill in the current form can benefit the major political parties, with relatively more feudal hold on population than others, in getting their women elected to disproportionately more number of reserved seats to improve their tally. Behind its progressive veneer, this appears to be the motivation.

The objection of Mayawati and Yadavs to the bill for not providing quota for the SCs, STs, BCs and Minorities actually smack of this precise fear that the bill if passed in the present form would erode their base. In face of it, it would appear misfounded, but in reality it may not. While there will not be any difference to the constitutional reservation for the SCs and STs, in case of others the disturbance in

constituencies due to rotational system proposed in the bill, the more entrenched political halo of traditional political families would score over the parties such as BSP and SP. This may not even be remedied by reserving seats for BCs and minorities.

As regards its core objective, it is naïveté to believe that this reservation would benefit oppressed section of women. If even in a relatively cohesive population like Dalits, the political reservation has produced huge negativity, the outcome of the political reservation to women, as disparate as Indian society, fragmented by castes, classes, communities, religions, languages, regions and so on, could only be expected to be worse. What way more number of elite women in parliament going to empower Dalit women in a village? Largely, these ladies would act as proxy of their men benefactor, who got them elected with their political halo, money and muscle power. Women's woes are not as much a matter of legislation as it is a matter of societal attitudes, which could be challenged at the level of practice and arrested by an efficient administration. In this way, reservation at the Panchayat level becomes more important than this one. Also, if there is a real political will for improving the situation of women, it would be better achieved by instilling gender sensitivity in the administration and making it accountable.

### **Progressive Automatons**

Empowerment of women is laudable objective. The pathetic state of women in our country cries for urgent action to improve their situation. India ranks shameful 114 among 134 countries of the world on the scale of gender equality. This situation cannot be remedied by instituting lopsided reservation. Increased representation of women in our legislature bodies is certainly desirable but if it is going to be mere surface reality and contrarily reinforcing the traditional power structure, it needs to be rethought. Most issues of democratic representation sought to be solved through reservation

perhaps could be resolved better in the electoral system of proportional representation as proposed by many analysts. It may be worthwhile to have a national debate on these issues than rush with stereotypical solutions.

It is a pity that our national life is governed by stereotypes. Reservation as a universally progressive policy is one such stereotype. It has assumed the status of a holy cow for our progressive people. That is unfortunate because it makes so much easy for the ruling classes to play havoc with the polity. Reservation in the Indian society divided with numerous fault lines is intrinsically fraught with many lacunae, which could turn it quite counterproductive if not conceived properly. It is being certainly used effectively by the ruling classes as a strategic tool to manipulate people. Our progressive automatons need to learn this basic fact.

# Capitalizing Calamity: 26/11 And The Jingoist Politics

## Class Character of 26/11

India faced more than 4,100 terrorist attacks between 1970 and 2004, accounting for about 12,540 fatalities, according to the Global Terrorism Database, maintained by the University of Maryland and the US National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). It makes an average of almost 360 fatalities per year. These fatalities peaked in 1991 and 1992, when 1,184 and 1,132 individuals (respectively) were killed in such incidents. Of course, the official figures in India are much higher than this count and place the toll at around 70,000 deaths. In 26/11, as per the latest figures, there were in all 163 casualties and 293 wounded, which may not make it particularly special. The earlier attack on 11 July 2006 in the form of serial blasts at seven places in local trains, the life line of Mumbai, executed within a short time of 11 minutes, the death toll was far higher at 200 and 714 wounded. In terms of potential, if one may say so, the 2001 attack on the Parliament of India in New Delhi, symbolizing our national sovereignty, in which 5 terrorists, 6 police and 1 civilian were killed was far more perilous than the 26/11 attack. Why then 26/11 alone is singled out as 'the attack on India' and is projected as India's 9/11?

The only distinguishing factor in 26/11 attack is that it is the first time that the elite establishments symbolized by the hotels Taj and Trident were targeted. In terms of casualties, about 61 persons were killed in these two hotels and balance 102; the single biggest toll being 58 of ordinary people shot at randomly at the CST station. There were 37 foreigners among those killed. Added to it was the killing of senior IPS police officials like ATS chief Hemant Karkare and Ashok Kamte, the Additional Commissioner of Mumbai Police for the East Region and wounding of Sadanand Date of the same rank. Although, the CST attack lasted for over 30 minutes just a

stone throw away from the police posse at the Azad Maidan Police Station, entire resistance effort was directed towards the Taj, Trident and of course Nariman House. Our elitist media also nearly ignored the CST tragedy and focused its attention during and after the attack around these places. After the initial hazy news about the attack on CST and other places, where ordinary people were killed, there was no mention of them. As the earlier attacks wherein mostly ordinary people were killed have been forgotten, this incidence also could have been very well forgotten but for its class content.

### **Ineptitude of Governance**

For more than 60 hours this calamity was transformed by the TV channels into a farce, which was watched by the entire world. The incompetence of the state machinery, whether it was mobilization of the Mumbai Police or the National Security Guards, who were summoned to help the response, at all levels, ministerial and bureaucratic, or at the levels of planning, strategy, or execution, was just glaring. The failure of Mumbai police has been just inexcusable. When the two terrorists shot people at the CST for over 30 minutes, they could have been immobilized there itself only if the police had acted in the manner they are supposed to. It is said that nearly 150 armed policemen had reached the spot within five minutes but they did nothing more than providing a running commentary to their offices. Neither they rushed in and confronted the terrorists nor did they effectively block the exits of the CST. As a result, those two terrorists could easily escape the CST through the TOI-gate via an over bridge to the Cama Hospital, and unleash havoc there while the policemen at the CST kept on informing about continuing gun shots. Whatever happened at the Cama Hospital through Metro cinema and Girgaum chowpaty, including deaths of Karkare, Kamte and Salaskar is directly attributable to this police inaction at the CST.

Another set of terrorists had entered the Nariman House, Taj and Trident. As they entered these places they fired upon people there and took safe position somewhere. Given the fact that the terrorists did



not have any demand and obviously wanted to inflict maximum damage, the only possibility was that they killed as many people as they could before they took safe position inside. In this situation, the police could have a strategy to corner them at the places of their hiding and possibly rescue or hold people at their respective places until the former was accomplished. Even for the NSG this was the only viable strategy to operate. Instead, what we find is the utter lack of it and just the display of firepower. The NSG went on unnecessarily exploding hand grenades all over and causing the damage to the structures. Even wearing out the remaining terrorists could have been the intelligent strategy after the people were rescued out. The very haphazard operation that went on for two days only exposed people to terrorists' bullets and exhibited our incompetence to the world. As the rescued people from these hotels averred, it was the hotel staff that showed more presence of mind, intelligence and bravery than our paid protectors.

It may be interesting to note that this was by far the longest operation of this kind anywhere. There have been many anti-terrorist operations in far more complex cases like hijacking of planes, which were accomplished within minutes or hours by the security forces of other countries without much loss of life. We often deride Pakistan but the effectiveness with which their security forces have dealt with Taliban terror is noteworthy. In a very comparable incident in Pakistan in August 2009, wherein teams of Taliban terrorists in police uniform had entered the security facilities in the eastern city of Lahore, the Pakistan police had gunned down nine terrorists and caught alive one terrorist within less than five hour of operation. Surely, it should prompt us to sit up and evaluate our security capability and learn from the mistakes.

After the incident, the Mumbai police claimed that they had intelligence and had also alerted the Taj management about possibility of such an attack. But the Taj management failed to rebuff their security arrangement. In the July 2006 serial blast incident, they said exactly same thing for railways. This game of externalizing the

blame goes on without anybody asking a relevant question as to what they did beyond informing others that they would be attacked. As it stands, we still do not know how many terrorists had really come in, when they came, what logistic support they had, who organized things for them and so on. When the FBI incidentally landed into Headley and Rana and found that they had hand in the attack, we claimed as though we discovered them and created another kind of hype. If it had not been for Tukaram Omble, that humble policeman who caught Kasab alive, taking shower of bullets from his AK56 into his body, we would have been absolutely clueless about even the identity of attackers as we still are about other pertinent details.

### **Meaning of Martyrdom**

It may sound sacrilegious to question the jingoistic manner in conferring martyrdom on the security personnel killed in the terrorist attack. Is it not the duty of the police or NSG to protect people from such attacks? If yes, then are such unfortunate fatalities not just a professional hazard, as much as a fireman exposes himself to blazing fire and faces imminent death or a mining worker faces death in the event of collapsing seam in mines or a health worker faces death from some deadly infection he could contract? How a policeman or a soldier doing his assigned duty becomes different from an ordinary worker silently doing his work in a factory? Any human loss is regrettable but just because policemen are in public eye, their life cannot become more important than that of a humble sanitation worker, who works silently despite all the social ignominy on a pittance of salary and contributes to the health of the country.

The death of a conscientious police officer like Hemant Karkare who exposed the Hindu terrorist network and dared to take action against it shall be mourned by all progressive people but his and his other colleagues accidental felling to the bullets of a terrorist does not make martyrdom. On the contrary, it is worrisome that why only a few officers like Sadanand Date actually took on the terrorists or only Karkare, Kamte and Salaskar rushed to fight them. The police

department, like any other organization, has the system of reward and punishment which should take care of these matters. These days with terrorist and extremist phobia whipped up by the ruling classes, huge rewards have been instituted for policemen, which inevitably lead to extra-judicial killings by the latter. Vijay Salaskar, who has reached his 'martyrdom', was an encounter specialist, who had killed scores of people in this manner, and contributed to a phenomenon of state terror, arguably one of the sources of terrorism. This context of anti-terror campaign of the government, sourced with huge funds in the hands of police, associated lack of accountability and lure of huge personal pay offs besides promotions should also be taken into account while assessing the police action. As it happens, perhaps the only person who deserved the national applause on 26 November - Tukaram Omble, was rather initially ignored, just because he was a low ranked Asst Sub Inspector.

### **Political Jingoism**

The political class has effectively capitalized 26/11-tragedy to its own advantage. While there should have been objective assessment of the handling of this incident by the police and the NSG, it grabbed the opportunity to raise the jingoist pitch eulogizing their actions. The scores of hoardings of martyrdom, congregations in name of paying homage, arbitrary distribution of grants to the families of security personnel who have fallen victims, the hyped trial of Ajamal Kasab and its inexplicable prolongation despite his categorical admission of crime, and the associated media hype has created jingoistic passion in people which would effectively blind them to the real issues behind this tragedy as well as other issues of governance. It sounds very normal, but the feudal practice of Ministers arbitrarily distributing largesse to anybody (here, the families of security personnel) without any norm also needs to be questioned. It is not out of genuine humanitarian concern for them, but for their jingoistic political design, that they do so. Jingoism, with essential trappings of patriotism and nationalism has always been the best bet for ruling

classes everywhere. For the people, however, jingoism is a veritable measure of fascism.

# Anna Movement Reflects Streak Of Fascism

By Sadiq Naqvi

25 August, 2011

*‘Vande Mataram or Bharat Mata are not merely innocent patriotic symbolisms, they are deeply identified with the RSS,’ says Anand Teltumbde. An eminent academic, writer, political analyst and civil rights activist, Teltumbde is a management practitioner based in Mumbai. He has authored many analytical books on Left and Dalit movements, including the acclaimed Khairlanji: A Strange and Bitter Crop. In this incisive interview, he critically dissects and analyses the Anna Hazare phenomena. In conversation with Hardnews*

What is your assessment of the structure, leadership, tone, tenor and ideology of this particular Jan Lokpal movement led by Anna Hazare?

As it appears ‘India against Corruption’, which calls itself a peoples’ movement and which is generously supported by many corporates, is behind this Jan Lokpal movement. As such, it appears quite amorphous and even spontaneous peoples’ movement. But it may not be truly so. The thousands of people that are seen collected at Azad Maidan in Mumbai and such other places in other cities and towns in India, and of course, many more in Ramlila Maidan in Delhi, are surely not individuals who all came there on their own. Many have been a part of certain organisations. At least in Mumbai, I have found people who are well known as associates of the Sangh Parivar being involved in the mobilisation of people. This hypothesis gets strengthened by the overall complexion of the movement and the manner in which it is being run. Its slogans, its demeanor, its attitude, its tone and tenor unmistakably reflect the imprint of the Sangh Parivar. Vande Mataram or Bharat Mata are not merely innocent patriotic symbolisms, they are deeply identified with the RSS. Ideologically, the movement reflects a streak of fascism, which, again,

is associated with the RSS. There is no doubt that RSS's pedigree is fascist; their praise for Hitler and Mussolini is too well-known to be forgotten.

Anna Hazare is not the RSS person, as he calls himself a Gandhian. But he also instinctively conducts himself in a dictatorial fashion albeit for the cause that he believes to be virtuous. But then, Hitler and Mussolini also believed in the virtuosity of their ideologies and the cause they espoused. People, who are not carried away by the rhetoric of this movement, are embarrassed by the undemocratic language he so casually uses. 'Lao, nahi to jao' is his recent slogan, which means the government has to bring the Jan Lokpal, and that too by the specified date as per his draft or else collapse.

**What is your assessment of the Anna Hazare phenomenon first in Maharashtra and now in Delhi?**

Anna Hazare came to limelight in Maharashtra by transforming his village, Ralegaon Siddhi, into an 'ideal' village as acknowledged by the State. He had launched the Bhrashtachar Virodhi Jan Aandolan (BVJA) (People's Movement against Corruption), a popular movement to fight against corruption in Ralegaon Siddhi in 1991, which led to the transfer and suspension of 40 forest officials. He carried on his struggles against corruption thereafter against ministers and went to jail a couple of times in connection therewith.

He was generally accused of taking on powerful people in Maharashtra so as to seek publicity. People in general did not take him seriously until recently and beyond western Maharashtra he was barely known. It is significant that most of the time BJP and Shiv Sena came in his support. In 2003, he went on an indefinite fast against NCP ministers and compelled the government to appoint a one man commission headed by retired justice PB Sawant to probe the charges. Sawant Commission report indicted many powerful ministers but also observed irregularities in the working of three trusts headed by Anna. One of the charges was spending huge money

for his birthday celebration. Abhay Firodia, an industrialist, subsequently donated Rs 2,48,000. Thus, he has been doing good work as a social activist in the state but did not reach the stature even in the state; he has been suddenly catapulted by the Jan Lokpal movement.

What clicks with Anna Hazare is his apparent simplicity, rootedness in the familiar Hindu tradition and the penchant for nationalist rhetoric. The manner in which he has taken up the issue of corruption sans its complexity gels well with the large population of urban upper-caste middle class, which, variously, grudge the government not being conducive enough to their progress. They generally attribute it to the present political system and political class, which is seen appeasing the underclass to get their votes. Neither do they want to see that it is the private corporate sector that feeds them money, nor do they see that the seeds of even political corruption lie within the peculiar electoral system that we have. It has failed to represent the people, who are accused of being pampered. It rather represents the moneybags that sustain the system.

Anna Hazare's simplistic rhetoric psychologically satisfies these classes and does not demand harsher analyses or actions on their part. Of course, it is not to be taken barely in such causal sense. The political establishment also has been tacitly supporting the phenomenon as it helped it distract public attention from the concrete cases of corruption that were getting exposed on its eve, to the bill-making parley as panacea. The government against which it appears to be arraigned, appears to have a big game plan in its apparent series of foolish actions. It needs deeper disdain among people for the political class so as to drive its neoliberal reforms more intensely. BJP, through its Sangh Parivar, is actively helping it with the hope of destabilising the government.

**Why is the corporate media supporting this movement 24x7 even while it compulsively ignores many peoples' movements of the poorest on the ground?**

Actually, apart from being an important vehicle for the agenda of global capital, the business model of the media seeks TRPs. It is always on the look out for what clicks with its target audience, which is the expanding middle class which typically comprises English educated, upper-caste, upwardly mobile people, and within that the fastest growing younger segment. I call this class as a neoliberal class as they do share free market ideology of neoliberals and take pride in India's emergence as an economic powerhouse. For too long they were ashamed because of the persisting backwardness of India with its humiliating 'Hindu rate of growth'. They saw everything Indian, including India's customs and traditions, culture, apologetically. But the economic boom of recent years, duly supported by the emergence of a professional class of Indian Americans, particularly in the field of IT, has restored this confidence with some vengeance. This class imagines India to be a superpower and views corruption along with a few other issues (such as reservations/ lack of meritocracy, appeasement of minorities, subsidies in favour of the poor) as the biggest hurdle in the realisation of this dream.

All these evils are moreover associated with the government, its main prop, politicians, who, for the sake of winning elections, keep on doling out largesse to the 'undeserving' underclass. One has to smell their disdain for the lower strata of the society, which, constituting numbers, vote for politicians to power. This is the class, the media is after. It chooses their issues, upholds them, and attracts them. It sets in a virtuous cycle the Hazare episode started. All news channels have been full time projecting this agitation with all superlatives at their command. In one way, it is an excellent example of how the modern media can make or unmake movements. There have been thousands of movements, far more important than perhaps this one, which go unnoticed because the media simply ignores them.

In contrast, one may cite the example of Irom Sharmila, the Manipur lady who has been on fast for more than 10 years demanding the repeal of the draconian Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA). But it is barely known to people because of media ignorance of it.



That the media is nakedly class-biased is an axiom today. It projects itself as supporting the anti-corruption struggle, but is itself a conduit of corruption. The corporate sector, media, which is essentially a part of it, and NGOs, which are the special vehicles of neoliberalism, are the veritable sources of the current phenomenon of corruption, but skillfully escape the attention of people.

**Do you think this anti-corruption movement has struck any chord with the margins, especially, Dalits, Bahujans and the poorest? If not, why?**

I guess the margins are untouched by it. Even after huge publicity, you will scarcely find poor peoples' representation in those crowds. Rather, Dalits have taken this movement as anti-constitutional. On all the e-mail groups of Dalits, there is strong criticism of this movement -- that it wants to undermine parliamentary democracy and the Constitution given by Babasaheb Ambedkar. As the Hindutva influence on it and the antecedents of the key people started surfacing, they are convinced that the movement is anti-Dalit. Arvind Kejriwal, for instance, was said to be the leading figure of the Youth for Equality, the upper caste anti-reservation movement. Hazare, as the feudal chieftain of Ralegaon Siddhi, who is propelled by the traditional Hindu ethos, wanted Dalits of his village as mere service providers.

Dalits, therefore, see it as an anti-Dalit movement. They have even organised a procession against it in Delhi on August 24 at India Gate (4pm). This is a significant development. Because, Dalits are the only class that has the capacity to effectively prevent the neoliberal march of the upper caste in India.

So is the case with Adivasis, majority of which anyway are caught between the life and death battle between the Maoists and the security forces, unleashed by the government. They do not see the legalistic solutions to their problems any more. Even Muslims have kept aloof from the movement, not because of the call of the likes of

Imam Bukhari, but because they see through the true character of the movement as irrelevant to their woes.

**Do you think the Jan Lokpal is any solution to the structural inequalities, injustices and tragedies of our country? Will the system change in any manner? Is it at all socially transformative?**

This movement claims to be against corruption, but, surprisingly, it does not reflect remotely the understanding of what corruption is; neither does it care to know its source, to curb it. Corruption, basically, is the byproduct of power asymmetry in society and, in that sense, Indian society becomes an ideal prototype for it because of its unique institution of caste. It is therefore that India figures among the most corrupt countries.

I guess it is still an understatement because the African countries that appear more corrupt are actually driven into corruption by the Indians there. This structural feature of the Indian society is at the root of corruption. Anna's movement is blissfully oblivious of it, or rather deliberately overlooks it. Even if corruption is taken in a legalistic sense, as financial irregularity or bribe, that also needs to be identified with the neoliberal economic structure, that is, accelerating enrichment of the rich and impoverishment of the poor. Anna's movement does not speak about it.

The scam-a-day type incidence of corruption that is behind the Anna Hazare's movement is a gift of neoliberalism. It is a undisputed fact that corruption has increased during the era of globalisation. A study by Global Financial Integrity, titled 'Drivers and Dynamics of Illicit Financial Flows (IFF) from India: 1948-2008' by economist Dev Kar, estimated the illicit financial flows from India during the 61 year period at \$462 billion. As much as 68 per cent of this aggregate IFF is attributed to the post-reform period of just 18 years. The post-reform size of the underground economy has increased on an average to 42.8 per cent of the GDP as against 27.4 per cent in the pre-reform period and the compound annual rate of growth of illicit flows which stood

at 9.1 per cent during the pre-reform period shot up to 16.4 per cent during the post-reform years. But, there is not even a feeble mention of this structure that begets galloping corruption. On the contrary, the entire movement could be seen as helping the neoliberal agenda by spreading contempt for the democratic governance system, howsoever faulty it may have been.

I would add one more thing: this movement for locating a Lokpal needs to be conceptually located within the 'regulator' framework of the IMF/ World Bank to take care of market delinquencies. Thus, it just does not relate even remotely with the structural or systemic aspects of corruption.

I do not see it addressing even the superficial aspects of corruption. Because it is intrinsically impracticable. How can an eleven-member team be imagined to be doing surveillance, investigation, conviction of the gigantic bureaucracy and equally pervasive political class? More dangerously, it would create a parallel oligarchy which is not accountable to anyone. It is almost sure that some such Lokpal will be installed soon in the country, but it will be just another institution, which will not scratch anything but perhaps add to the harassment of poor people, whom it purports to protect.

**You had earlier told Hardnews that Anna Hazare operates like a feudal lord? Can you please elaborate?**

I am sorry if I used that epithet but lord may be a wrong word. I would call him a feudal chief, like what exists in African society where such a figure maintains tribal customs and traditions with a self-righteous attitude -- at times enforcing with force. The chief's writ is not violated by tribesmen. The vision, with which Anna Hazare brought about the transformation of his village Ralegaon Siddhi, actually fits into the traditional Hindu mould, with a military command structure, with him at the helm. Obedience of the followers is the key word. The village had a significant number of people with army background, which came handy for him to operate that way.

(Anna was a truck driver in the army.) Not only did it not have any democratic content, there was public contempt for the institution of party politics. There has not been any election in Ralegaon Siddhi for the last 24 years.

Many strange things took place in the village, like banning of sale of bidis in the shop and playing music other than bhakti songs, punishment for drinking alcohol -- and all such things have taken place with the acquiescence of people. However, the language of acquiescence can be highly brahminical and hegemonic. Everything is inspired by traditional brahminical values. His explanation of the virtues of vegetarianism, and why Dalits are treated as untouchables, smacks of the typical Hindu philosophy.

Dalits are generally accommodated in village, but the village ethos, ordained by Hinduism, expects them to meekly provide service to the village. Their condition has not much changed. Notion of Dalits being 'dirty' still prevails and the broader values and codes assigned by the Hindu traditions are never challenged. In sum, all that is flaunted as development in Ralegaon Siddhi village is basically in the mould of Hindu idealism which did not leave much scope for people, particularly of the lower castes, to actually participate.

# Retrograde Judgement Rewards Hindutva Zealots

04 October, 2010

The parallel may not be palatable to everyone but the recent verdict of the Allahabad bench of the Lucknow high court may be compared with a case that was decided some eight decades ago in a small colonial court of Mahad in Maharashtra. Like this one, which has great implication to our secular fabric the Mahad judgement pivoted the future of a nascent movement launched by the Untouchables for securing their civil rights. The case was filed by the orthodox Hindus of Mahad to block the move of the Untouchables to perform Satyagraha at the Chavadar Tank in Mahad in December 1927 with the contention that the tank was their private property and hence the Untouchables could not trespass it. The court of the sub-judge of Mahad granted them temporary injunction on the eve of the proposed Satyagraha. Although the Satyagraha therefore was suspended, the case was zealously fought by none other than Dr Ambedkar and won. Just imagine if the court had relied on the faith and belief of the majority Hindus as the Allahabad judges did, what would have been the fate of the case and consequently that of the entire social reform movement in India. Surely, the faith and belief of the Hindus would have certainly considered the Chavadar tank as theirs to keep the Untouchables away in the first quarter of the last century.

Those were the colonial times. Nearly a century later, the independent India swearing by so many lofty ideals in its Constitution and aspiring to be a global superpower, we have gone back to faith and belief of the Hindus to decide the most important aspect of our national character, secularism, which represents a social contract this country had with its minorities. On many other aspects too, it would put us into reverse gear. Just imagine, if the courts were to take faith and belief of the Hindus for deciding cases, the decadent customs like sati, child marriages, untouchability, caste atrocities, etc.

will all get validated and perhaps the Manusmriti may replace our Constitution. This judgement needs to be read in this perspective and seen in its potential danger to the basic premises of our nationhood.

Surely the Ayodhya judgement has miserably failed us on these counts. As such, it was a simple case of deciding property right over the disputed land around the spot on which the Babri masjid once stood. In absence of the clear title deed to the contrary, the court had to go by the physical evidence that the masjid existed there. There is a principle of possessory provision in the law which entitles land title to those who have uninterrupted and unchallenged possession of an area for twelve years or more. Surprisingly, the court dismissed the case of the Waqf Board and the Nirmohi Akhara claiming titles to the Inner Courtyard (where the Babri masjid stood) and Outer Courtyard (where the Ram Chabutara was located) respectively. It was indisputable that the masjid was at the spot uninterrupted, from 1528 until 1949 (when the namaz was last read there) and also the Ram Chabutara of Nirmohi Akhara, where puja, bhajan-kirtans were performed uninterrupted since 19th century. As regards the claim to the area under the central dome, as the birth place of Ram Lalla, a five-judge bench of the Supreme Court had already ruled in 1994 that it was incapable of legal determination while responding to the Presidential Reference sent to it after the demolition of the Babri Masjid. There was thus a legal position of the highest court of the land to guide the three judges of the Allahabad court on that issue.

But the learned judges chose to seek archeological evidence to see whether there existed a Ram temple as contended by the Hindus. How was it relevant? Even if archeology came out with an evidence to show that there was indeed a Hindu temple, can it be construed that the land belonged to the contending Hindus? It only proved that before the mosque was built, there existed a Hindu temple and nothing more. There is no way to find out the property transaction that took place while constructing a masjid there. But our court has seen what even archeology could not see. The Archeological Survey under the then NDA government led by BJP, which spearheaded the

Ram Temple movement, came out with the finding that there existed a place of worship at the place where the mosque stood. This evidence also was not incontrovertible, having been widely disputed by experts. But did it prove whose place of worship it was? It could well have been the Buddhist or Jain temple? Even assuming it was a Hindu place, could it be proved that it was a Ram temple and beyond that it was a place where Ram was actually born? However, the judges transcended all boundaries of reason and tended to accept the spot under the central dome as the birth place of Ram.

It is not uncommon in the countries like India having old civilization to get some remains of old structures beneath the existing ones. As a matter of fact, India does not have even archeological evidence for its claim of being an old civilization beyond Mohenjodaro and Harappa. The next living evidence after a dark period of a millennium and a half that one gets belongs to the Buddhist period which extended well until 9th century. It is during this period the historians tell us that entire India was dotted with Buddhist viharas, monasteries, and Buddha idols. Very little of that is seen today. It is a known fact that the Hindus had decimated Buddhism, and usurped most of these viharas to build their temples in medieval times. If the mosques were built at the site where temples stood, it is equally true that the temples were built at the site where the Buddhist viharas stood. Incidentally, when the Babri masjid contention was hot such a claim was feebly proffered on behalf of the Buddhists by the late Dr Savita Ambedkar, the widow of Dr Ambedkar. Indeed, if the court is inclined to go into archeology, it will have to logically take cognizance of such a claim of Buddhists for the simple reason that Ayodhya figures more in the Buddhist (and also Jain) literature as the important religious place than in any of the Hindu text as the birth place of Ram. Not even Ramcharitmanas of Tulsidas, written in the 16th century in the same province has any mention of Ayodhya being the birthplace of Ram. In fact there is no incontrovertible evidence for Ram being a historical personality. The mythology takes him back to 17 lakh years and the pseudo science of the Hindutva ilk to

the 7000 odd years. And still the judges have gone to establish the exact spot under the central dome of the destroyed Babri masjid.

Indeed, there is something very weird about the Ayodhya judgement and even the reactions it evoked. The judgement forsook the principle of hard facts and reasoning in taking cognizance of nebulous notion such as faith and belief. Even on that count, it may be contestable that what is construed as belief of the majority of Hindus, is really the fabricated notion by the unscrupulous politicians hammered into the minds of gullible millions in recent times. If it was the belief of the majority of the Hindus, the history would have provided evidence of some disturbances during the five centuries of existence of the Babri masjid. The entire controversy started only after the idol of Ram Lalla was placed under the central dome surreptitiously by some miscreants in 1949 in the frenzied communal context of those times. It was ostensibly a political move, which launched a lasting communal contention that eventually culminated into destruction of a historical structure and created countrywide mayhem devouring thousands of lives and most importantly the social contract between the country and its minorities, which has been the basis of our nationhood. Leave apart the majority of Hindus of India, even their majority in Ayodhya also does not believe that Ram was really born under the central dome. There are many temples in Ayodhya which are known to be the birthplace of Ram. It is only the Sangh Parivar which initiated and propagated this notion for mobilization of Hindus for its political objective.

This judgement has validated that evil politics by accepting that it was the “place of birth of Lord Ram as per faith and belief of the Hindus” as Justice Agrawal wrote and “The disputed site is the birth place of Lord Ram ... Hindus have been worshipping the place...and visiting as a sacred place of pilgrimage since time immemorial” as Justice Dharam Veer Sharma wrote. The main slogan of the Hindu zealots, “mandir vanhi banayenge” (we will build the temple at the same spot) is enabled by the judgement, vindicating their stand that it was the birthplace of Ram. The least that could have been done by



the judges is at least to grant the Babri mosque site to the Muslims. It is futile to say, as Chidambaram observed that it has nothing to do with the act of demolition of the Babri masjid on December 6, 1992. Once this judgement validated the basic claim of the vandals that the masjid was an illegitimate structure built after destruction of the Ram temple, the criminal case gets automatically weakened. The award of the title of the desired land to them accorded moral justification to the vandals' act in retrospect. Even without this judgement, it was inconceivable that someone like Advani would be convicted for the vandals' act. With the judgement, all those provocations of Advani and party that led the frenzied mob to raze the domes to ground get transformed into quasi truth.

The Judgement is falsely defended as reconciliatory. It does not reconcile anything, when it openly gives out the Hindus what they even could not expect themselves. The fact that there was no adverse reaction to the judgement from people anywhere is no proof that it was accepted by all the communities. In any case only the Hindutva forces have been the trouble mongers; Muslims just expected a fair deal from the court. They had kept calm when someone installed a Ram idol right at the centre of their masjid; they maintained it when the locks were put around the idol and later opened allowing the Hindus to perform pooja in their masjid; they preserved it even when they were communally abused all over the country during Advani's Rath Yatra; they controlled it when it was demolished by the frenzied mob and rather suffered in its aftermath. Babri masjid, as it were, was more important to the Hindutva zealots than ever to the Muslims. They were hurt not as much by the loss of the masjid as by the breach of trust by the Indian state. Still they reposed faith in Indian judiciary but have now felt even betrayed there. The Muslims are in no position to take combative posture and are trying to display magnanimity even to the extent deciding not to appeal to the Supreme Court or to help Hindus build Ram temple at the allotted site. Actually, Mohammed Hashim Ansari, a nonagenarian leader of the Sunni Waqf Board proposed negotiated settlement with Mahant

Gyan Das, who as the head of Ayodhya's Hanuman Garhi temple and the Akhara Parishad, is said to have good influence over Nirmohi Akhara. The only hurdle they both perceive is with the Ram Lallawallahs, supported by the Hindutva gang.

It is the Hindus, particularly Ram Lallawallahs who having got what perhaps they had not expected are belligerent and want to appeal to the Supreme court. There was no question of any mischief this time for several reasons: one, the state did not want it because of the commonwealth games among others, and the Hindutva forces had lost their steam to recreate the mass frenzy as they did in 1990s. Even in their hey days, as many political observers would agree the Hindutva forces would not have been as successful as they did without the tacit support of the state. This time the political equations were not the same. In order to keep the issue alive, the Hindutva forces will certainly go for an appeal. Probably all the parties would. The dispute would take another ten years and until then the site would be a veritable minefield ready to explode any time. The government will have to cordon off the area with heavy security and consequent inconvenience to the local population. Therefore in practical terms the judgement would not serve even the purpose of paving the way for reconciliation as some commentators imagined. Chidambaram is right when he termed the judgement as "not operational".

"I believe that the Ayodhya judgment will mark the start of a new chapter for national unity," Advani told reporters in his first reaction to the Ayodhya verdict. By now everybody knows the Hindutva definition of 'national unity'. It means that if the non-Hindus wish to live in India, they will have to live as per the terms of the Hindu majority. Advani could not hide his glee when he said, "It has affirmed the right of Hindus to build a temple at the sanctum sanctorum." Indeed, that's the crux of the Ayodhya judgement. But its import is not limited to just that. By allowing faith and belief to overtake reason it has pushed the jurisprudence back into darker times, portending a big threat to the Constitutional vision of India.

# Swan Song Of The Sena And Cabaret Of The Congress

23 February, 2010

For the last couple of weeks, Mumbai is turned into a theatre of the absurd around the high-pitched themes of Marathi and patriotism, which although too familiar to all, are sounding like a swan song of the Shiv Sena. The kind of bewildering responses it has been receiving from the ruling Congress party at the centre as well as the state however have been purely entertaining as to be likened to the cabaret- political cabaret-- on the stage.

## The Sena and its Senapatis

Shiv Sena, created in June 1966, capitalizing on the growing disillusionment of Marathi masses with the way their Samyukta Maharashtra had turned into a capitalist den and reviving the Marathi sentiment that lay at the root of that movement, whipped up through a Marathi weekly Marmik by Bal Thackeray since 1960s as anti-migrant resentment, basically served the purpose of luring away Marathi workers from the left trade unions which had had visible sway over public life of Mumbai. Its rapid rise however is attributed to the surreptitious support it received from the then chief minister Vasantrao Naik, which helped it build its brand of a 'roaring tiger'. Entering the stage with a song of Marathi, it participated in elections right since its formation and soon graduated to Hindutva as it made bigger electoral sense. It struck electoral alliance with the BJP and soon emerged as a major political force. In the wake of Babari demolition and bloodbath that followed, it was soon catapulted to power, firstly to the BMC and later to the state. It thrived on its money and muscle power, fear of the growing middle classes, huge support from media and its ruling class nexus that ensured the soft corner of the state. Although, it grew beyond Maharashtra, its core strength lay in its control over Maharashtra and Mumbai.

This Sena control has been clearly dwindling as the results of recent elections suggest. In 1995 the Shiv Sena-BJP combine had won 138 seats and formed the government in the state. In 1999, its tally came down to 125; in 2004 it further declined to 116 and in 2009 it came to its lowest ever to 90. This decline has been particularly marked in Shiv Sena, the major partner in alliance. For the first time in the last two decades since the SS-BJP alliance was formed in 1989 that the Shiv Sena has been reduced to a minor partner, by winning less seats in the state assembly than the BJP. There are many reasons for this decline: exodus of leaders like Chhagan Bhujbal and Narayan Rane, considered to be two of the four pillars of the Shiv Sena; revolt of Raj Thackeray, the right hand man of Bal Thackeray, and formation of Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS), desertion of Sena by the cadre to join MNS, aging of senior Thackeray, and more importantly exposure of its true character as the self seeking terrorist outfit to the Marathi people. The newly formed MNS has conclusively truncated its base by capturing almost entire Mumbai belt except a lone seat of Kalyan.

The death of Shiv Sena appears fast closing on its Senapatis. Their last hope is to preserve their hold on Mumbai in the BMC elections in 2012. As one of its important leaders, Subhash Desai admitted, "Maintaining Sena rule in BMC is the most important thing for us. ... we will do so with constructive violence". [Indian Express, 16.11.09] For, if they lose Mumbai, they know they will never rise again. It is in this desperation that they are using all their worn-out weapons in their armory-- Marathi, patriotism, anti-Pakistan. The current controversies over Mumbai for Maharashtrians involving Sachin Tendulkar to Rahul Gandhi, over release of My Name is Khan and over obstructing the IPL matches flouting nationalism clearly reflect that the swan has begun to sing its last song.

### **A Slap in the Face of Terror**

Shiv Sena has operated with certain set of strategies: never take on the state power head on; attack the collectives of poor and hapless

people but rich and famous individuals. In relation to the former, it uses brave rhetoric but avoids direct confrontation. As for the latter, both get it huge publicity and reinforce its power over people. It has always caught celebrities in controversies to attract media attention and reinforced its terrorist prowess every time they buckled. This time, innocuous statements like “I am an Indian first” is picked up to create controversy. It was Sachin Tendulkar first and in sequel Mukesh Ambani, Rahul Gandhi, Shahukh Khan and others. It is pointless to see rationale in Bal Thackeray and his minions. He invokes martyrdom in Samyukta Maharashtra movement to embellish his irrationality as though all martyrs were his Shiv Sainiks. He forgets that these martyrs sacrificed their lives not for creating any parochial entity, least the dictatorship of Thackeray clan. They laid their lives dreaming of socialist Maharashtra of workers and peasants, articulated by the communist, socialist and Republican leaders. Thackeray, if at all, stands opposed to all of them. The slogan of ‘Maharsashtra’s Mumbai’ meant the claim of incipient state of Maharashtra to include Mumbai. It never meant that it only belonged to Maharashtrians as mischievously propagated by Thackerays.

This time all this Sena rhetoric has flopped. Condemnation poured in from every corner. Sena ally BJP disapproved it. Even the middle classes overcame their fear of Sena and came in support of Sachin and others. When Rahul Gandhi was brought into fray, Sena expectedly targeted him and threatened that he would not be allowed to enter Mumbai and later to show him black flags. When he actually came, there were barely a few dozen Sainiks on the streets. He dramatically decided to travel by the local train through the so called Shiv Sena bastion like Dadar and completed his tour successfully without any trace of Sena protest. Unlike earlier times when celebrities buckled before Thackeray, none this time retracted their statements. From Marathi he tried to exploit the issue of Australian and Pakistani players playing in the forthcoming IPL III tourney but met with the similar condemnation. People defiantly displayed the placards in

Mumbai that obstructing players is pure terrorism. Belated though, it was clearly a slap in the face of Sena terror.

### **Pawar's Underhand Support**

Sharad Pawar often showed that he can stoop to any depths for his political ambition. When Thackeray's threats were punctured by people, Sharad Pawar descended from Delhi to prop up the Sena cart. A politician of dubious record, his entire politics has been unscrupulously oriented to his sole ambition of becoming the prime minister of this country. He miscalculated his prospects in raising the issue of foreign origin of Sonia Gandhi in 1999 and by 2004 had come full circle endorsing her even for prime ministership swallowing all humiliation. He dreamt of bigger role at the Centre but it went bust as his NCP could get just six members to the Lok Sabha and consequently Pawar had to make do with a relatively un-coveted agriculture ministry. In the general elections of 2009, he parleyed with all political parties for alliance to get better deal from the Congress and eventually just managed to maintain his position in the previous government. However, with ascendant mood of Congress, he knows he could be disposed off at the earliest opportunity.

Right since 2004 elections Pawar has been keeping his communication line with Bal Thackeray open. In 2009, it was used to extract better deal in seat adjustment with the Congress. He has been using the strategy of tacit support to Shiv Sena to stave off precipitation with the Congress. At the current juncture, when he is facing barrage of blame from the Congress for the price rise, he has used the alibi of mediating with Bal Thackeray for smooth conduct of the IPL matches to caution the Congress against its humiliating behaviour. He is in position to internally support Shiv Sena through his home minister in Maharashtra and embarrass the Congress led government, which could come handy for him to capture power in Maharashtra in alliance with Sena. In the current episode, the Shiv Sena was completely isolated on the issue of Mumbai as well as IPL matches. All its rhetoric appeared falling flat until Sharad Pawar went

to meet Bal Thackeray. None believed that he had gone there for buying peace for IPL matches, but it is not adequately noted that Shiv Sena revived its threat against Shahrukh Khan's movie only after that meeting.

### **Floor Show of the Congress**

If Pawar is blamed for playing politics, the Congress, at the helm of affairs at the center as well as the state, also cannot escape the blame in its flip flop. Although, both from the center and the state the usual brave statements were issued to maintain the law and order, they remained shy of naming Thackerays who were behind the threat. Chidambaram, who is ready to kill thousands of tribals in process of eliminating the illusive naxal terror through his Operation Green Hunt refused to see the concrete face of terror in Thackerays. The Maharashtra government also kept issuing sterile threats and refused to act against them. While the legal luminaries opined in public domain (television and press media) that Thackerays could be easily booked under the IPC sections 153, 153A, 153 B and several others any time in the past as now, the Maharashtra government feigned business examining their statements. If it wanted to, it could contain Sena within days. But with its clumsy responses it has only helped the Sena in displaying its power to the people. The gigantic police deployment in Mumbai in the wake of the Sena threat reflected just the jitters in government and in turn the power of the Sena. The police which arrests and incarcerates scores of innocent people without reason could easily arrest Thackerays and their minions and realize that they were just the paper tigers. Unlike earlier times, the people had clearly given their verdict against Sena. The government however clearly failed to cash in on it.

In the current episode, what Pawar did is far more damaging than even Thackerays. It may be astute political move on his part but it cannot be denied that it was conspiratorial intrigue against both the state and the people. When the union home minister as well as the state chief minister assured about the smooth conduct of the IPL

tourney, how could a cabinet minister, whatever his other roles may be, ignore them and negotiate with the person issuing threats? In doing so, he has clearly undermined the constitutional authority of the government and legitimated the extra-constitutional behaviour of someone. Congress obviously has its political compulsion in not precipitating the issue, but it could surely castigate him for what he has done. While the state Congress leaders unequivocally blamed Pawar, the central leadership defended him for his role as the chief of the cricket board. Whether it is the drama over withdrawal of security to Sena leaders or the security arrangements to theaters scheduled to show Shah Rukh Khan's film, the government's behaviour has only helped Sena's bravado.

Media, which provides life blood to Sena, can be easily accused as the culprit. Bal Thackeray often showed contempt for the media and occasionally prompted physical attacks on media persons, but inexplicably the latter have always worked for him in giving the prime exposure to whatever he said and did. In the wake of its threat to block the release of Shahrukh Khan's movie, the entire media reeled off programmes around Shiv Sena round the clock for nearly two weeks and made this prank into a national crisis. While it is easy to condemn the media, it must be realized that media in the neoliberal era is pure business. On careful analysis, one finds that the real feed for it comes from the theater of the absurd that our politics has been. And the real losers, the people!



## Khairlanjis could be deterred by tit for tat'

July 19, 2010

*On July 14, the Nagpur bench of the Bombay high court commuted the death sentence awarded to six convicts in the Khairlanji murder case to 25 years' rigorous imprisonment.*

*On September 29, 2006, a mob brutally raped a mother and daughter before killing them along with her two sons. Surekha Bhotmange (then 42), Priyanka Bhotmange (17), Roshan Bhotmange (19) and Sudhir Bhotmange (21) belonged to one of the three Dalit families in Khairlanji, a remote village in Mohada tehsil of Maharashtra's Bhandara district. Bhayyalal Bhotmange, the head of the family, survived as he was away from home that fateful day. The perpetrators of the crime belonged to the upper castes.*

*In a way Khairlanji is a metaphor for all the atrocities committed against Dalits across the country. Despite their numerical strength (Dalits constitute 16.6 per cent of India's population), Dalits in India are routinely at the receiving end of caste conflicts. While some atrocities against Dalits get wide media coverage, a majority of the incidents are ignored.*

*Khairlanji, too, would have been ignored had it not been for huge protests over the incident across the country by Dalits, believes Dr Anand Teltumbde, a Mumbai-based Dalit intellectual, thinker and human rights activist, who authored Khairlanji: A Strange And Bitter Crop two years after the incident.*

*In an e-mail interview with Rediff.com's Prasanna D Zore, Dr Teltumbde speaks of how atrocities like Khairlanji can be prevented, why Dalits in India have failed to organise themselves into a powerful political bloc despite Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mayawati's emergence, how the Congress party in Maharashtra*

*treacherously suppressed the Dalit voice, and how and why Dalits have digressed from the essence of Dr Ambedkar's ideals.*

**Was Khairlanji an aberration? What needs to be done to prevent such atrocities?**

No, Khairlanji was in no way an aberration or a unique occurrence. It is just incidental that it came into the limelight.

The reason perhaps lay in the blatant manner in which the police sought to suppress it initially as an incident caused by the outrage of simple village folk over the defiance of a woman who persisted with her illicit relationship with a man despite their sane advice to stop it. The Khap-kind of izzat (honour) syndrome!

There have been similar incidents before and they continue to occur even now; they either go totally unnoticed or get buried in the records of some innocuous police station.

In fact, there was an incident at Jhanjhardi just 40 km from Aurangabad in Marathwada just prior to the release of my book on Khairlanji in October 2008, where a Dalit woman was raped and her husband badly thrashed.

Both were to be set afire but just then the police reached the spot. Potentially it was no different from Khairlanji, but no one took note of it.

There is no easy method to stop the occurrence of such atrocities on Dalits. The legal course is tedious and full of hurdles for the victims. You know, the police records nearly 30,000 atrocity incidents (against Dalits) every year. But they represent just the tip of the iceberg.

It is said that at least nine out of ten atrocities go unreported.

The village dynamics is such that a poor Dalit victim would not firstly dare to go against the powerful upper castes to report the

crime. Even if s/he musters enough courage to reach a police station, the police machinery would not pay heed to her/him.

It is only with some activists' backing that the police will record the atrocity. These are well-acknowledged facts. What happens later is also well known.

Even if the atrocity gets recorded, they would not apply appropriate sections of the relevant Act (as happened in the Khairlanji case where many Dalit leaders, activists and scholars are upset that the case was not properly built by the police who recorded the FIR, and then the prosecution which made no efforts to bring the Atrocity Act into play).

The police investigation would be so lackadaisical that it paves the way for the eventual release of victims.

When the case comes up for hearing in courts, the prosecution could be more callous and then come the judges who would not see any caste angle in such crimes.

What would you call it if the lower court as well as the high court does not see any evidence of caste in Khairlanji, which may veritably be a text book case otherwise of a caste atrocity?

This being the legal process, how can one think of a systemic remedy?

The remedy to my mind lies only in people's action.

It is clear that if there had not been a strong spontaneous agitation over Khairlanji, the courts would not possibly have given the punishment they gave.

It is only public pressure that extracts judgments from the courts. I would go so far as to have a viable anti-caste movement against such atrocities.

Atrocities in my analysis constitute the metrics of caste and need to be curbed with force by those who want caste to be annihilated. The deterrent could only be in terms of tit for tat.

Unless the perpetrators of atrocities are hit back with matching brute force, they would not realise that they are doing something wrong.

It may sound like raw revenge by jungle law when I say such a thing, but I have an elaborate theory behind this.

There is a deep-rooted caste prejudice against Dalits, and this (prejudice) would not tolerate them being conducted on equal terms. There is no method to correct such a deep-seated cultural residue than the shock treatment (I have suggested).

Moreover, there is empirical evidence that support my theory. This, however, would be possible when Dalits learn to join hands with other people on the basis of class.

Caste can never bring them this kind of strength.

Persisting with the caste idiom, I am sure Khairlanjis will keep happening and this kind of interviews will keep recurring for centuries to come.

**Has the Indian State failed in its duty to protect the life and property of the deprived and dispossessed, more so if they happen to be Dalits?**

Yes, definitely the Indian State has miserably failed to protect the life and property of Dalits.

Actually, going by the rise in the incidence of such atrocities, one could reasonably infer that it has promoted caste prejudice by its acts of omission or commission.

Let it be understood that today's caste is not the classical caste based upon some rituals.

It is very different, and the forces of modernity induced by the State bring in that difference. The State cannot be absolved of its responsibility in its dynamics.

The State represented by the police for the common Dalit masses could be seen at the core of village dynamics.

When the upper castes perpetrate caste atrocities, the police appear to be on the side of the perpetrators.

In many cases, Dalits feel that they could have avenged the atrocity on them but for the police force backing the criminals. That is the ugly face of the State as far as the common Dalit folk in villages are concerned.

**Why have Dalits in Maharashtra failed to form a political bloc, and what explains the dominance of Marathas in the state's politics?**

The dominance of Marathas is the outcome of the political economy of the Nehruvian modernist project independent India implemented during the first two decades.

It is not confined to Maharashtra; it has happened all over the country.

This project mainly comprised land reforms followed by green revolution. The land reforms, howsoever half-baked they may be, gave ownership of land to the farming castes and displaced the upper caste landlords from villages.

The latter saw greener pastures in the capitalist economy emerging in towns and cities and gladly relocated themselves. The Green Revolution that followed increased agricultural productivity and enriched these farming castes significantly.

The agricultural surplus accruing through this process began flowing to petty businesses in nearby towns, further enriching a section of these castes.

This project introduced capitalist relations in villages by developing a credit market, input and output markets and the money economy. Socio-culturally, vacating of the village lordship by the upper caste

landlords gave the baton of Brahmanism into the hands of these middle band Shudra castes.

Politically, the advanced sections of these castes took advantage of the amorphous caste relationships among the populous Shudra castes to build a formidable constituency for themselves.

The increasing spread of education among Dalits, awareness about their civil rights, and the consequent assertion of those rights also came handy for catalysing the consolidation of the Shudra castes.

Marathas are nothing but the Kunbi farming castes, the advanced section of the Shudra castes.

These castes, calling themselves Backward Castes and Other Backward Castes and taking advantage of the vast masses belonging to their own caste band that have been rendered poor, have actually come to dominate politics right from the village to Delhi, and also arguably command dominance on the economy.

Why Dalits have failed to create a political bloc is to be partly found in the above process. Because eventually, it is the matter of power asymmetry in the village setting, the abode of the majority of Dalits.

The increasing power of the Shudra castes like Marathas made them adopt the age-old ruling class strategy of co-option or decimation.

If you recall the 1964 countrywide satyagraha for land for landless that took place under the leadership of Dadasaheb Gaikwad, which had shaken the Congress citadel, you would find in it the roots of decimation of the Dalit movement.

To plug this erupting Dalit volcano over their deprivation, the Congress had to hurriedly adopt the above strategy. Yeshwantrao Chavan, the Maratha patriarch, had skilfully co-opted none other than the doyen of Dalits -- Dadasaheb Gaikwad -- by offering him a Rajya Sabha seat.

Thereafter, many minor Dalit leaders just looked for an opportunity to desert the Dalit applegate and climb the Congress bandwagon for self-aggrandisement.

Every time the Dalits tried to re-launch their independent movement, this ruling class strategy decimated them.

Around 1970s the Dalit Panthers had made waves and created a scare in the ruling establishment, but it was soon decimated.

What happened then can be seen by anyone. There is a kind of ideological lacuna too that I see as responsible for the state of the Dalit movement.

Dalits have made Ambedkar into their demigod but have conveniently forgotten the essence of his teachings.

There could be many more reasons for the failure of Dalits to consolidate into a powerful bloc, but the major one remains the odds of the political economy stacked against them.

**What explains the failure of the Dalits in seizing political power? Of course, the rise of Mayawati is an exception but otherwise it has failed on a national scale.**

As I said before, the splintering of Dalits across the ruling parties and their hopeless fragmentation should explain the failure of Dalits to secure political power.

Mayawati also is not an exception as such but her success lies in her strategy to thwart this phenomenon as much as the unique advantage she had in Uttar Pradesh in the form of demography of Dalits and the political vacuum of sorts that existed after the desertion of RPI (Republican Party of India) leaders like B P Maurya and Sanghapriya Gautam.

But to take Mayawati's as Dalit power will be a mistake. She or her Bahujan Samaj Party never called it a Dalit party; it is the Bahujan party.

It assimilates the BCs, OBCs along with all minorities, conveniently winking at the material contradictions these social groups have among themselves and particularly with Dalits.

It is therefore that the BSP, despite being the most powerful party in the state, could not reduce the incidence of atrocities against Dalits. It (Uttar Pradesh) remains the number one (state) in atrocities on Dalits!

Rather, Mayawati had to issue the most infamous instruction not to register any crime under the Atrocity Act without prior approval of district magistrates.

Howsoever pious the motivation of the (BSP founder) Kanshi Ram-Mayawati duo might have been while launching their movement, there is no doubt that the compulsion of electoral politics has conclusively overtaken them.

When the BSP has proclaimed itself as Sarvajan party, overlooking the social contradictions among the Sarvajan, just to secure political power, it no more remains even the so-called oppressed peoples' party.

The BSP structurally cannot replicate itself anywhere else, leave apart nationwide. Those who dream of it replicating its success nationwide, forget all the unique combinations that helped it catapult to power in UP.

The demographic advantage -- the state's SC population comprises some 21 per cent of the population, and that too over 80 per cent of it belonging to a single caste bloc of Chamars and Jatavs -- is to be found nowhere else.

Even Punjab, which exceeds UP in Dalit population percentage (28 per cent against UP's 21 per cent) does not have the advantage of a single Dalit caste being so dominant. The Dalits there are so fragmented that such a vast majority, and even a wealthy one at that, gets beaten there by the Jats.

**Do you feel the media ignores caste conflicts in india?**



Yes, the media grossly ignores Dalit (not caste) issues in general. The media, after all, has been the exclusive citadel of the upper castes, and reflects a monumental ignorance of Dalit affairs. Firstly it suffers from the ubiquitous caste bias, which gets compounded by its ignorance.

Let me explain. As I said, there was a significant caste atrocity at Jhanjhardi near Aurangabad but nobody seems to know about it. As a matter of fact, an atrocity on Dalits takes place every 18 minutes in the country. Mind it, they are all significant because the minor ones will never get to the statistics.

**How many of them are really taken up by the media?**

Unless there is a public (read Dalit) mobilisation around the incident, the media just ignores it. It had verily ignored Khairlanji also. It is only when there was an outbreak of public rage that the media took note of it.

Ignorance of the media surfaces in numerous ways. But only one example would suffice to illustrate it.

When the media speaks about caste, it invariably mixes up backward castes with Dalits. Even many so-called caste scholars suffer from this confusion. These two caste groups, for the reasons (of political economy) stated before, reflect serious contradictions. Rather, the atrocities on Dalits are exclusively perpetrated by the BCs.

In media, this crucial difference is never evident. It entails a horrible consequence.

When the Mandal reservations were accepted in 1989 by the V P Singh government, the media's ambiguous projection caused riots in which the BCs battered Dalits at many places. The Dalits in their folly had taken up a pro-reservation stance and descended on the roads.

The media often takes up the posture of secular progressiveness as most of its constituents belong to that hallowed group. This group

typically behaves like an automaton. Reservations then automatically become a progressive issue; caste census becomes a naturally supportable issue. Such posturing, it does not even realise, is very detrimental to Dalit interests and worse, to the national interests which certainly lie in the annihilation of castes.

**Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar had given a clarion call to the Dalits during the Mahad agitation: learn, organise and agitate. Why have the Dalits in Maharashtra and India failed to educate themselves despite reservations after Independence?**

It is not correct to say that Dalits have not educated themselves. If you count in just quantitative terms, the Dalits as a social group has achieved the fastest educational spread than any other social group in the country.

Even in higher education, the situation is not very different despite the many odds they face.

Today Dalits are found in every sector. They have reached the highest echelons of bureaucracy, in technology and medical sectors.

This process has created a sizeable Dalit Diaspora out of second and third generation Dalits. Much of it has happened through the reservation process. Paradoxically, this very process has restricted its spread to larger sections of Dalits.

Its benefits are being monopolised by an increasingly smaller section. It was inevitable. The vast majority of Dalits finds itself excluded from these benefits.

In qualitative terms, there appears to be a serious problem. It is mostly attributable to the grossly iniquitous education structure in the country.

Quality education is structurally made available to increasingly rich and elite people. Dalits are grossly excluded from this quality education sector. Globalisation has been aggravating this problem with tremendous speed.

As regards Babasaheb Ambedkar's slogan of 'educate, organise, and agitate' is concerned, he probably had a much broader meaning of all of these terms than normally understood (by Dalits in India).

'Educate' for him was not merely to obtain some degree but to really understand the world around yourself.

How many Dalits, for instance, understand the geopolitics or international economic forces that impinge on their interests? Rather, these terms are alien in the world of even well-educated Dalits.

Ambedkar's 'Organise' did not mean just launching your outfit to claim political tribute from the ruling classes. 'Organise' obviously meant building the wider organisation of all Dalits, nay even beyond Dalits. It is a pity that they did not even understand, while chanting victory to Ambedkar (Jai Bhim), that although he focused on Dalit emancipation as his life objective, his method has always been based on class.

Ambedkar's 'Agitate' also did not mean as Dalits probably reflect the internecine struggles. 'Agitate' means that there should be intrinsic annoyance at any violation of human rights, any form of injustice or exploitation.

He expected Dalits to be in the vanguard in these matters.

**Do we see this orientation among Dalits today?**

I was amazed that when the Bhandara sessions court pronounced the verdict awarding the death sentence to six and life imprisonment to two, the Dalits including their leaders celebrated it.

They ignored the damning part of the judgment that Khairlanji did not have any caste angle; it was not even a planned or premeditated crime.

The verdict made it to be a crime committed in a fit of rage. That reflects the anticlimax of Babasaheb Ambedkar's 'Educate, Organise and Agitate'!

## The false Dalit of capital

THE SIMPLEST way to assess any development from the standpoint of the oppressed people is to observe the reaction of the adversary camp. On the eve of opening of the Mumbai chapter of the Dalit Indian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Dicci) on May 28, there was excitement in the business world that almost every business paper covered the news prominently. The big corporate houses, like Tatas and Finolex, had already sponsored a Dicci show, DEEP Expo, in Pune last year, that supposedly showcased 200-odd Dalits, where mainstream business chambers had participated.

In contrast, Dalits who generally celebrate the slightest identitarian accomplishment have been surprisingly nonchalant. They have totally ignored Dicci, which has been around for the past five years. Going by the thumb-rule assessment with the above criteria, one may not be wrong in suspecting if Dicci may have anything to do with anyone but Dalits. In fact, it appears to be of particular interest to the capitalist camp and the neo-liberal state.

The basic point Dicci makes is that Dalits have arrived, which, although grossly wrong, is of profound political importance. The Dalit entrepreneur is not a recent breed. They have been part of the Dalit struggle, which flowered in the liberal spaces created during colonial times. Likewise, there have been rich individuals too among Dalits. But they have been insignificant to Dalit community.

If one takes into account the profile of a majority of Dalits, one is immediately struck with the incongruity of the concept. Dalits are predominantly rural people, almost 81 per cent of them live in rural areas; approximately 50 per cent of them being landless labourers, 24 per cent as marginal and small farmers and the remaining 26 per cent engaged with non-farm vocations. Of the 19 per cent who live in urban areas, more than 85 per cent live in slums. Thanks to the policy of reservation, a political system that ensures flow of tribute to the political class and the entrepreneurial drive of a few, over the past

60 years not more than 10 per cent of Dalits may be taken as having “arrived”.

The pro-elite, neo-liberal policy paradigm over the past two decades has reversed the wheel of progress for 90 per cent of Dalits, who have been facing multidimensional crises. The health statistics place them as the near-famished community; with rampant commercialisation of education, they have been cut off from the quality education; what little land they had is being taken away. With growing power asymmetry in villages between them and non-Dalits, the number of atrocities on them are galloping. To such people, the propaganda about Dicci by a handful of individuals should surely cause annoyance. Unfortunately, thanks to their pseudo-representatives, they no more have an organised expression. But, even their silence speaks.

The proponents of Dicci state that the US has hundreds of African-American chambers of commerce to help the African-American people do business. Notwithstanding the differences in these two societies and two communities, no one will deny that there is much that can be mutually emulated. Although, the civil rights struggle of Dalits precedes the civil rights movement in the US by a full quarter of a century, Dalits have keenly noted the progress the Blacks made and tried to emulate them. In the 1960s, it was the Black literature movement that was emulated to create Dalit literature. A while later, the Black Panthers were emulated to form the Dalit Panthers in India. Like Dalits, the larger Black community has been uninterested in it, leaving it to be the game of their handful elites. But, unlike Dalits, there have been concurrent assessment of this phenomenon of individual success by the Black scholars, which cohere to the point that the wealth of few African-Americans has made very little contribution to the plight of African-Americans in general.

Black capitalism has a chequered history, starting from pre-Civil War period; many prominent Blacks like Booker T Washington upholding it with active support from the big bourgeoisie like Andrew Carnegie

and at the same time many Black leaders opposing it. The masses, however, were consistently kept away from these games of their rich. In the recent times, Black capitalism is associated with presidency of Richard Nixon (1968-1974), who viewed an uncontrolled Black Power movement of the 1960s as a major threat to the internal security of the United States and also found it fitting in his “Machiavellian” political scheme to incorporate Blacks into the “anti-Communist” system as part of his Cold War strategy.

Despite this active support from the US establishment that Nixon galvanised, the state of Black capitalism in the 1980s was far from encouraging, as noted by writer Manning Marable. He saw Black capitalism as three distinct constituencies: the proletarian periphery; the intermediate Black petty entrepreneurs; and the Black corporate core. The first one comprised over four-fifths of all Black-owned US firms, 82.7 per cent of the total number. He noted several common characteristics among these 1,91,235 enterprises: almost all were sole proprietorships, unincorporated firms owned by a single Black individual; most were started by Black blue-collar or marginally white-collar employees; the firms were under-capitalised from the outset and at least 75 per cent of them become bankrupt within three years. The corporate core of Black capitalism comprised just 1,060 Black businesses, led by Black Enterprise magazine’s top 100 firms. Even this constituted a drop in the corporate ocean. As Manning observed, white corporations allow Black companies to exist for symbolic value.

As in the case of Black capitalism, Dalit capitalism should not be seen as the development promoting Dalit entrepreneurship or wealth generation among them; rather, they should be seen as subverting the logic of contemporary political economy. It firstly serves the purpose of both, the Indian state and the big bourgeoisie, insofar as the mass of potentially threatening community of Dalits is incorporated into their creed. One does not have to go back to ideological making of Dalit, for instance by BR Ambedkar, who termed capitalism to be one of their enemy duo, the other being Brahminism. The state,

which systematically ignores the demands of the crisis-ridden Dalit masses, had put up a red carpet to the upstart Dalit bourgeoisie and proactively wanted to know what it could do for them. The corporate interests are varied, ranging from the emergence of the sizable Dalit middle-class market to making the Dalit enterprises subservient to their supply chains and control Dalit proletariat. Politically, the move will have huge diversionary potential, further marginalising the agenda of the Dalits. No one grudges wealth generation among Dalits, but let no one associate it with the economic progress of Dalits.

## Edge Of Reason

Amid the heat generated by the Muslim League's Lahore resolution on Pakistan and the extreme reactions across the subcontinent, the sole dispassionate voice was that of Dr B.R. Ambedkar. *Pakistan or Partition of India* (1940), his full-length book, became a reference treatise for all those engaged with the issue, including the main dramatis persona, M.A. Jinnah.

For others, however, it remained unduly controversial. For Ambedkar, Muslims were not the worst victims of the Hindu society. They had a better deal compared to the untouchables.

The book was such that any casual or motivated reader could easily pick up stray pieces to support his own hypothesis. Hence, many distortions are in vogue but the commonplace impression is that Ambedkar supported Partition. On the contrary, he demolished all arguments for the creation of Pakistan. Admitting the communal antagonism between Hindus and Muslims, he demonstrated that it could not be a valid reason for a partition of the country. With examples of Canada, South Africa and Switzerland, where antagonistic communities lived amicably under a single Constitution, he dismissed the inevitability of Pakistan merely on the grounds of a communal divide.

The two-nation theory as the basis for Pakistan was also refuted by Ambedkar. While noting that Muslims were advancing from the state of community to that of a nation, he contended that it did not necessarily constitute the basis for Pakistan. Even if the Muslims were assumed to be a nation, it did not warrant a Pakistan since India had not yet lost its 'organic filaments'.

While admitting that India too was not a nation, he disagreed with those including Jinnah who thought that India could not become one. Those who argued for Partition, he wrote, were guided by colonialist



writers who emphasised differences between people and ignored the forces that bound them together.

Ambedkar also thought the Muslim apprehension that Swaraj would become a Hindu raj untenable because the Muslims had already reconciled to living in the more rabid Hindu raj sustained by Hindu princes against whom the Muslim League had never raised any objection. He did not see much substance in the political objection of the Muslims that Hindu society was undemocratic simply because they were not its worst victims. The Muslims, he observed, enjoyed a much better deal compared to people from the untouchable castes.

While he was skeptical about the innate imperialist characteristics of Hinduism creating accommodative conditions for the peaceful coexistence of minorities, he did not spare the Muslims for their own minority communalism. For him, the abolition of parties like the Muslim League and Hindu Mahasabha and formation of a mixed party of Hindus and Muslims was the only effective way of burying the ghost of Hindu raj. He did not perceive much difficulty in the formation of such a party based on the material conditions of the majority. In fact, such political unity was achieved between 1920 and 1937 when in most provinces the Muslims, non-Brahmins and depressed classes worked as a team under the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms.

Having dispelled the validity of the Muslims' misgiving that they would be persecuted under Hindu raj, Ambedkar did not rule out the possibility of the emergence of the latter when he prophetically declared: "If Hindu raj does become a fact, it will, no doubt be the greatest calamity for this country. No matter what the Hindus say, Hinduism is a menace to liberty, equality and fraternity. It is incompatible with democracy. Hindu raj must be prevented at any cost."

Ambedkar struck at the root of the Muslim argument that the creation of Pakistan would solve the communal problem. He termed

the Muslim League's Pakistan scheme a political perversion because instead of solving the problem of minority Muslims, it made them more vulnerable and favoured the majority Muslims who did not need or deserve it. Pakistan was unnecessary for Muslims in areas where they were a majority and worse than useless for Muslims where they were a minority.

On December 15, 1946, in his maiden speech in the Constituent Assembly, he hoped that some day the light would dawn upon Muslims and "they, too, would begin to think that a united India was better for everybody." Secularism and democracy were the sole basis of coexistence. In the crowd of small and big villains of the Partition drama, Ambedkar stands out as the only hero, a true statesman.

# Global Polarization and The World Order

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Polarization is defined as the tendency towards concentration at two opposing extremes (poles). It is the process by which a power distribution is altered through alignment and coalition formation. Sociologists are prone to use polarization when describing processes of social change — as, for example, in Karl Marx's account of the polarization of capitalist societies into 'two great hostile camps' of bourgeoisie and proletariat. The polarization between contending social forces is seen as a key cause of the end of many regimes, and many other decisive breakdowns of political order. Polarization subsumes unequal development but is not the same as unequal development. Unequal development has been integral with history since antiquity but "it is only in the modern era that polarization has become the immanent byproduct of the integration of the entire planet into the capitalist system".

Polarization is a systemic process that divides population into two opposite camps, e.g., rich and poor, capitalist and workers, blacks and white and so on. When the contradiction between these two camps reaches its zenith, the system (society) undergoes qualitative transformation. This principle of dialectics led Marx to anticipate proletariat revolution, transforming the capitalist society into a socialist society. Whether one subscribed to this Marxist dialectics or not, polarization is always associated with the threat of change. Insofar as polarization in the world has been around for a long time, ordinarily it should have led to some kind of qualitative change. But, there is no such change in sight, either at the global level or at the level of nation state.

This paper seeks to trace polarizations in recent history in order to understand the relationship (or absence of it) between polarization

and social change, primarily at the global level and extend the process to the micro levels.

### **Polarization and Polarity**

Samir Amin (1994) has conceptualized how polarization has changed with the evolution of the capitalist mode of production. In the mercantilist capitalism (1500-1800), it was in the form of dominant Atlantic centres, and the peripheral zones (the Americas). In the classical form of capitalism that followed mercantilism, after the industrial revolution, the peripheries extended to include all of Asia (except Japan) and Africa, which remained rural, non-industrialized, and as a result their participation in the world division of labour took place via agriculture and mineral production, and the centres were crystallized into core industrial systems as national auto-centered systems which paralleled the construction of the national bourgeois state. These two characteristics gave rise to the ideology of national liberation with the goal of industrialization as synonym for liberating progress and, the goal of constructing nation-states inspired by the models of those in the core. This remained the dominant characteristic of polarization, which gave rise to two world wars, lasted up to the end of the Second World War. In the post-war period (1945-1990), the peripheries gaining their political autonomy and achieving some amount of industrialization, this characteristic weakened and commensurately saw progressive dismantling of auto-centric national production systems and then re-composition as constitutive elements of an integrated world production systems, the deepening of so called globalization.

Each of these polarizations is further characterized by the number of autonomous centres of power in the international system, which is a function of the distribution of power only among major actors. It is usually referred to as polarity, which describes the nature of the international system in any given period of time. Although, the concept of polarity has been subject to imprecise and often diverse use, it does serve the purpose of depicting international systems in

terms of their power dimensions as distinct structural variables, taking into account polarized patterns of conflict coexisting with processes of power diffusion. Polarity, as Waltz (1975) suggests, has been the subject of a great deal of theorizing, much more so than any other aspect of the distribution of power. The conventional notion of polarity involves an ordinal scale ranging from unipolarity to multipolarity with bipolarity in between. Unipolarity is normally associated with the concept of hegemony, although that term connotes a form of dominance by a single country which is somewhat less direct than imperial rule. Multipolarity is frequently seen as a prerequisite for the operation of a balance of power system.

### **Prospects of world Revolution**

From the polarization that began happening from the third quarter of the 19th century, in terms of intensification of engagement of European core with peripheries, many theorists had developed notion of imperialism. John Atkinson Hobson, a British fabian socialist and Rudolf Hilferding, an Austrian born Marxist economist were to note this phenomenon as imperialism. Rosa Luxemburg another Marxist to explain imperialism as essentially embedded in the basic process of accumulation. Vladimir Lenin, who heavily relied upon the former two works and disputed the latter, in his study *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalist Development* (1915-1916) became the most influential theorist of imperialism. His entire book is a study of imperialism as a stage in capitalist development. Immediately after the publication of the Lenin's book, his own Bolshevik comrade, Nikolai Bukharin also published his study, *Imperialism and World Economy* (1917), with a favorable introduction from Lenin, which had "world economy" as a centrepiece for its analysis, while discerning the processes of imperialism.

Lenin developed his theory based on concentration of capital into large monopolistic corporations integrated with and led by a few large financial oligarchies. Lenin described how highly concentrated 'finance capital' had come to dominate and control capitalism by the

very late 19th and early 20th centuries in the US, Germany, France, and to some extent Britain. Lenin theorized that intensification of engagement of the capitalist countries with the periphery and the concentration of capital into large financial oligarchies were intrinsically linked. The concentration of capital engendered inequality and loss of purchasing power with masses, which constrained aggregate demand levels in the capitalist core. The general population could not absorb the mass of commodities produced by higher levels of productive capacity. While the insufficient demand created continual realization crises, the rising price of raw materials threatened profits further. The falling rate of profit required economic expansion to open up new regions for investment, sources of raw materials, and new consumer markets, which in turn created acute competition between the 'imperialist' blocks.

Lenin defined imperialism as: capitalism in that stage of development in which the domination of monopolies and finance capital has established itself; in which the export of capital has acquired pronounced importance; in which the division of all territories of the globe among the biggest capitalist powers has been completed. He identified five characteristics of imperialism: 1) The concentration of production and capital developed to such a stage that it creates monopolies which play a decisive role in economic life; 2) The merging of bank capital with industrial capital, and the creation, on the basis of 'finance capital', of a financial oligarchy; 3) The export of capital, which has become extremely important, as distinguished from the export of commodities; 4) The formation of international capitalist monopolies which share the world among themselves; and 5) The territorial division of the whole world among the greatest capitalist powers is completed.

Lenin saw in the longer term this process undermining imperialism, and thereby capitalism in the core through development of nation-state rivalry, culminating into inter-imperial wars. The costs and devastation of these wars would weaken core nation-states, not only

because the losers would find themselves with a diminished capacity to exploit the periphery, but because nationalist movements in the periphery and anti-colonial wars would undermine the capacity of even victorious core nations to exploit the periphery. Once the core lost control over its colonies the imperium would stagnate domestically, which would raise the level of antagonisms between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, leading to a social revolution in the core. The theorization had great strategic significance for the world revolutionary project Lenin conceived. It assured the world proletariat that their emancipation was imminent. While those in core, (a section of which he called 'labour aristocracy', bribed by the capitalists) should shun their short term interests and fight the capitalists, those in periphery, should tactically shun class struggle and align with their bourgeois nationalist struggle in order to weaken the imperialists. The polarization seemed to confirm to this theorization inasmuch as the first and the second World Wars proved the inter-imperialist rivalry. However, thereafter the imperialist camp adjusted itself and freed colonies from political control on their own, but without undermining capitalism in any manner. The resultant situation resembled Kautskian ultra-imperialism than Lenin's imperialism and even confirmed that Lenin's criticism of Rosa Luxemburg was somewhat misfounded.

The Leninist theory of imperialism has not only failed to bring about world revolution, on the contrary, it has undermined the class struggle, the prescribed instrument for it. It has unintendedly extended the lease of life to the capitalist system, and thereby prolonged the suffering of people.

Indeed, the economic polarization all over the world is pervasive. International inequality, generally measured by comparing national per capita incomes, has been increasing with unprecedented pace. Countries with the highest per capita incomes in the early 1800s are still today's richest countries, indicating persistence in the structure of international inequality. In 1820 Western Europe's per capita income

was 2.9 times Africa's; in 1992, it is 13.2 times. In the 1990s per capita incomes increased slowly but steadily in high income OECD countries, but many transition countries in Central and Eastern Europe, particularly the CIS, many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa and some countries in Latin America and the Caribbean experienced economic stagnation. Income surveys suggest that global inequality increased between 1987 and 1998. Some studies suggested that global individual incomes were converging until 1970 but thereafter they began increasing and returned in 1995 to the level of 1950.

Cornia with Kiiskii studied the trends in within-country income inequality in 73 countries from 1950s to the mid 1990s. They found that in several countries inequality declined during the first 20-25 years of the post World War II period following a decline in unemployment, stable earnings inequality and growing redistribution in the OECD and socialist countries and the introduction of programmes of land reform, educational enlargement and some redistribution in developing countries. This trend towards lower inequality came gradually to a halt in many countries. Starting from the mid 1970s, and increasingly so since the early 1980s, frequent reversals in national inequality trends were observed in the OECD countries (beginning with the USA and UK) and the Latin American nations. This brief summary suggests that the declines in income inequality observed (with some exceptions) during the Golden Age were reversed over the last two decades, as country after country experienced an upsurge in income inequality. As a result, the trend of the domestic Gini coefficients has taken a more or less pronounced U-shape, with the turn-around year placed most commonly between 1980 and 1990. Only in nine small and medium-sized countries (such as Honduras, Jamaica, France, and Malaysia) is there evidence of a decline in inequality over time. Inequality remained constant in 16 countries including Germany, as well as in countries for which data from 1995 to 1999 show a perceptible deterioration of their inequality trend.



This extreme economic polarization that is characterizing the present global order would ordinarily lead to breaking the ties that bind the social poles together and create the ideological foundations of revolution. But this does not seem happening. It only indicates that polarization or its polarity is important in consideration of preservation of world orders but inconsequential to changing it. The reason for this may be found in the assumption that polarizations along various dimensions necessarily cohere. While it is true that economics induced polarization gets reflected in political polarization, but there are many other axes, particularly identitarian axes, which may not cohere with the former. Rather these identitarian axes are known to cross the material axes most times and weaken them. They escape attention of the polarization discourse, whether it is at the global level or at the local level. At the global level, along with the stark economic polarization, one finds polarizations along religious, national, ethnic and other identities. Take for instance, the 'clash of civilizations' thesis of Huntington proffered at the time when economic polarization was reversing its historical trend for the worse, which had almost dominated the polarization discourse for almost a decade. After 9/11, and invention of Islamic terror, the polarization into Islamic and non-Islamic worlds is a more dominant discourse than the economic polarization. This is equally valid at the level of a nation, where class polarization is weakened by the polarization along identitarian axes such as caste, community, language, region and so on. This has been the main reason for the paradoxical finding that when the necessity of change in global order is felt most, the forces that could bring it about are the weakest.

Thus it is the multi-axiality of polarizations, not mere polarity, which is most important in understanding polarization and its potential towards global change. The forces of status quo have long recognized this principle and have successfully strategized to stave off the pro-change forces. However, those who needed to know it most do not seem to comprehend it.

## Gujarat 2002 and Modi's Misdeeds

Just thinking of it, a shiver runs down my spine. I had my own brush with how the Hindutva gangs carried out the abominable organised killing of Muslims in Gujarat in 2002. It was 4 March 2002, just five days after it all began. Like anybody else, disturbed by the gory tales coming out from Gujarat, but with the bravado of a civil rights activist, I rushed to Ahmedabad, the city that I had loved as a student of the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Ahmedabad.

The flight had just about 10% occupancy. The airport did not show any sign of untowardness but as I was driven into the city, the scars of the previous three days began appearing with increased frequency. As planned, I took one of my Muslim friends, well-bred and well-placed, an aristocrat of sorts, to take me to the disturbed areas. My driver did not quite understand what I was up to and spoke of his fears but maintained an uneasy cool. On our very first round, we were intercepted by a gang of some 20-odd people that hurled a volley of questions. Mustering all my strength, I managed not to show any nervousness and asked them what they would do if I was a Muslim. There was a little commotion. My driver intervened and told them in Gujarati that I was a high official coming from Mumbai. They could have reacted anyway they liked, they could have damaged the car, they could have assaulted us or even gone beyond. Somehow they let us go with a warning to be careful.

The makeshift burial grounds which had been loosely filled and sheltered scores of corpses of innocent men, women and children; the blank stares of the onlookers who had escaped that fate; the community camps with hundreds of uprooted families who had lost everything and lay there half-starving with swarms of flies; the busy volunteers managing the television anchors while looking after the needs of inmates; and half-burnt houses within sight that re-minded them of their lost worlds. These are the memories. Camp after camp,

one worse than the previous one with even more gory stories made us almost senseless. The afternoon meeting at IIM with the students who were infused with a humanitarian spirit and the meeting with activists at Prashant where I got to see some of the gory pictures like of a heap of half-burnt bodies of children that made me burst into tears. It was too much to take. The evening meeting at the Behavioural Science Centre enlivened the sagging spirit, seeing scores of people daring all the odds and organising rehabilitation work. Chief Minister Narendra Modi was providing palpable proof of his being behind the genocide, as everybody believed, by defiantly keeping his government away from the scenes of devastation. It was only after the world began expressing its indignation at his misdemeanour that he began the patch-up work.

### *No Shame, No Pain*

Scores of fact-finding teams visited Gujarat and brought out gory details of the tragedy. All of them were unanimous in holding the state government and Narendra Modi, personally, as being responsible for this unprecedented human tragedy. In May 2005, the government informed the Rajya Sabha that 254 Hindus and 790 Muslims were killed in Gujarat in the post-Godhra riots of 2002. A total of 223 people were reported missing, 2,548 sustained injuries, 919 were rendered widows and 606 children were orphaned during the riots. Notwithstanding the fact that these figures have been vehemently disputed by the activists, the Hindu fatalities mostly pertained to the adivasis and dalits, who were used as the foot soldiers in this carnage (which multiplies the crime of the Hindutva forces), and the property destroyed mostly belonging to the Muslims. If Modi had been a non-partisan chief minister, as the Constitution mandates him to be, he should have expressed genuine regret for having failed to arrest such a wanton destruction of lives and property. Instead he and his minions kept repeating their nauseating linkage between the organised carnage in the state and mysterious burning of a coach of the ill-fated Sabarmati train on 27 February

2002. The persistent orchestration of this irrationality, neither Modi nor BJP realised, was exposing their guilt instead of covering it up.

Even after facing several embarrassments from official and unofficial enquiries, the courts and worldwide indignation, Modi continues to justify the genocide with his mischievous mechanics that it was a mere reaction to the action in Godhra. The centrally- appointed Banerjee Commission had concluded that Godhra was an unfortunate accident. The report, which was promptly challenged by the state government, need not be taken at face value but if one goes by who benefited from the Godhra deaths, there remains scope to suspect that it could even have been planned by the Hindutva forces. After all, it was the subsequent mass killings of Muslims that won Modi landslide victories and brought him huge political mileage so as to be projected as a future prime ministerial candidate. Godhra thus presents three equal possibilities: one, it was an accident; two, it was a criminal act of some Muslims; and three, it was a conspiratorial plan of the Hindutva forces themselves.

### *Lies of Vibrant Gujarat*

Though unconnected to the 2002 killings, another lie that Modi has systematically built up over the past decade to build a shield around him is that he made Gujarat prosperous and vibrant. This helped to castigate those who demand justice for the 2002 victims as being against the people of Gujarat and to dodge the issue altogether by saying “forget and move on”. Closing down relief camps, abruptly Modi declared “all clear” and in 2003 launched the biannual extravaganza called the Vibrant Gujarat Summit. By offering investors all kinds of things in a true nawab style, he got many businessmen to shower praises on him and project him as true prime minister candidate. Huge sums were publicised as committed investments in the memoranda of understanding but as the right to information queries by activists revealed, the actual materialisation remained at a paltry 25%, barely on par with Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu. In 2003, Gujarat’s 20 out of 25 districts figured in the

list of 447 backward districts identified by the Planning Commission, the top place being Dangs of Gujarat. The state contributed six districts to the 50 most backward districts in the country. Gujarat ranks 17th among the 18 larger states in terms of budgetary allocation to the social sector despite its miserable social development indices.

Modi unleashed a massive PR exercise to project himself as the builder of vibrant Gujarat. The fact remains that Gujarat was already amongst the most industrialised states. Two decades back, the annual growth rate of Gujarat was between 12% and 13%, almost double the national average of 6% to 7%. Today, it is 11%, marginally above the national growth rate. By opening the coffers of the state for industrialists to loot, it has immensely contributed to the making of the richest billionaires in the country but has left the common man high and dry. According to the India State Hunger Index 2008 of the International Food Policy Research Institute, Gujarat is shockingly ranked worse than Orissa at as low as the 13th among 17 major states, just above Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Bihar and Madhya Pradesh. Anaemia in Gujarat shows an alarming rise. The percentage of women suffering from anaemia in Gujarat has risen from 46.3% in 1999 to 55.5% in 2004 (Third round of National Family Health Survey 2006) and that of children from 74.5% to 80.1%. As state Congress president Arjun Modhwadia claimed, 16,000 Gujarati workforce including 9,829 workers, 5,447 farmers and 919 farm labourers committed suicide during Modi's tenure.

### *Sadbhavana Salt*

Without an iota of remorse, Modi enacted his sadbhavana drama on the eve of the 10th anniversary of the 2002 genocide without ever visiting any of its victims. Oblivious to the ghettoisation of Muslims in Ahmedabad that he catalysed and people still reeling in fear of a communal conflagration, he picked up comprador elements from Muslims, dalits, Jains, Sikhs, Christians, etc, to road show his "communal harmony". It was nothing short of rubbing salt into the

wounds of thousands of victims, who still crave for justice. It is inconceivable that Modi will ever pay for his sins. We have such a proven system that works perfect for the class of moneyed and powerful but still keeps the masses hopeful. Ten years of legal battles have thrown only specks of justice that have been favourable to him. In a case filed by Zakia Jafri, widow of slain Congress former MP Ehsan Jafri, who was killed along with 66 others in Gulberg Society, the Supreme Court-appointed Special Investigation Team (SIT) did not find any evidence against 62 accused and their mastermind Modi. So it will be elsewhere, the testimony of the suspended Indian Police Service officer Sanjiv Bhatt notwithstanding. Modi's misdeeds go beyond the 2002 genocide. There is the case of Hiren Pandya, whose family has raised questions about who the real mastermind behind Hiren Pandya is.

There have been many encounters in Gujarat of the alleged terrorists who were out to kill Modi. In one such case in which I was associated with a fact-finding mission is widely believed to have been stage-managed: the killing of 19-year-old student, Ishrat Jahan, along with two others. The case stands opened up and is being investigated by the SIT but the question is whether justice will ultimately be done. One can surmise that most of the so-called terrorist attacks were also the fabrications, the plots that served the strategy of Modi-like unscrupulous politicians.

The question is, where we go from here?

## Some Questions around Kasab's Case

May 29, 2010

There was expected jubilation on May 6 when Mohammad Ajmal Kasab, that little devil who felled 72 innocent people including 14 policemen jointly with his deceased partner, Abu Ismail, on 26/11, was awarded death sentence by the Special Judge, M.L. Tahaliyani. Three days earlier when he was held guilty of all the 86 charges, Mumbai had heaved a sigh of relief as though it had apprehended his acquittal. All the news channels were full of Ajmal Kasab and Ujjwal Nikam, the new public hero in our super public prosecutor. He was shown comically holding something resembling a book, Yes, You are Guilty, and appeared so pleased with himself that one had just to see it. And why not? After all, it was the case involving the mother of all terrorist attacks. This din, however, drowned many precious questions this episode has thrown up.

### Theatre of the Absurd

Someone like Kasab belonging to the enemy nation captured in camera while shooting, thanks to The Times of India's Sebastian and caught alive after killing 72 people, thanks to that really brave soul, Tukaram Ombale, deserved more punishment than one could imagine was undisputed even before the Special Court was constituted to try him. That India, as the constitutional state, should demonstrate due process of law to even such an alien devil is not disputed. But merely for this procedural demonstration, was it really necessary to set up a theatre of the absurd at huge public cost?

The day Kasab was shifted to the Arthur Road Jail, the entire area around it became a fortress with the blocking of three-fourths of the public road and erection of make-shift chowkies at both the ends with a posse of policemen ready to shoot and dozens of policemen loitering along the entire road, ostensibly for the security but one did not know whose. Was there really a security threat for or because of

Kasab? What kind of threat could it be? Threat from whom? No one ever asked such questions. For the residents along the road it was a nightmare to cross the wall of policemen and for those petty business people a virtual starving. But who cares? Thousands of commuters through the road had a big diversion to take causing traffic jams and burning precious fuel. But who cares? Guess, these must be the most genuine people to rejoice at the end of the Kasab trial in the hope that their own trial would also end.

The state spent Rs 35 crores over this security drama. No one would anyway ask even if it had been Rs 350 crores or Rs 3500 crores! No matter, this is the most indebted state. No matter, this huge amount could be enough to save a few thousand of farmers from killing themselves or to save Mumbai from the unseemly sight of people using railway tracks as their toilet every morning! Such people's issues have been effectively reduced to non-issues in the jingoistic noise about the security of one does not know whose.

### **The Heroes and Herogiri**

There is no problem congratulating Ujjwal Nikam on his achievement of the stature of a public hero. It is indeed commendable for a person coming from a village far-off from Mumbai to make such a mark. But in terms of his professional performance, is there anything really noteworthy? Kasab's was anyway an open-and-shut case. There was nothing to prove when the entire nation saw him killing and hated him as never before. Kasab's conviction was not Nikam's credit as projected in the media. Nikam had handled another high-profile case, the case of Khairlanji caste atrocity immediately before this case. He was similarly in the media blurting out whatever was happening and not happening. When the verdict came he was similarly overpleased with himself. Even Khairlanji was an open-and-shut case as far as the crucial questions were concerned: that it was a pure caste atrocity, that the modesty of two women whose dead bodies were found naked and semi-naked with bruises all over were sexually assaulted, and that the villagers had conspired and executed the attack. None of



these crucial charges were held by the court. Khairlanji was reduced to a simple ordinary murder committed by someone in reaction to some petty provo-cation. One is aware that the police prosecutor does not produce evidence, he just marshals evidence gathered by the police investigation. But then that's it!

Kasab was pronounced guilty simply because he was alive. As things stand, if he had not been caught alive, we would have been blissfully ignorant about the entire 26/11 operation like many such earlier attacks. The credit thus goes to only Tukaram Ombale, that humble Assistant Police Sub-Inspector, who dared the terrorists' AK-47s and caught Kasab alive at the cost of his life. Even after this, the police has barely gone beyond what meets the bare eye. The crucial questions, like how these 10 boys could execute the task so efficiently, who provided them logistic support here, how good or bad the police and NSG response was?—all remain absolutely unanswered. While 26/11 was happening, as the television channels showed, one of the terrorists had asked his interlocutor to recall the slaughter of Muslims in Gujarat. What was the meaning of that? Didn't we need to do something about it? If the plight of Muslims in India is indeed creating these terrorist attacks, it becomes the root cause. Should we do something about this root cause or just celebrate suppressing the symptoms every time they surface?

We perhaps have showed our insensitivity to it by projecting two innocent Indian Muslim youth—Fahim Ansari and Sabahuddin—as the co-accused of Kasab. Here one has to remember the contribution of a talented young lawyer, Shahid Azmi, in saving these people from imminent miscarriage of justice. It was Shahid who completely demolished the concocted map story of the prosecution and proved their innocence. Jingoists may never acknowledge it but if anyone contributed most to India's prestige in this episode apart from Judge Tahaliyani, it was him. Like Ombale, Shahid had paid its cost very dearly. As he himself knew it, the vile system brutally eliminated him.

**Hanging the Dead?**

Kasab's case brings up the important debate about the efficacy of the death sentence. By Indian law indeed there cannot be an apt case—'the rarest of the rare'—than this to be awarded death. Therefore, it was utterly meaningless to speculate over it as our media did. It served no purpose except for the jingoist agenda of raising patriotic passions in the people. The television channels had run a full campaign through public opinion that Kasab should be given death, not only death but he should be hanged at the earliest and some people even wanted him hanged in a public place. Judge Tahaliyani rightly awarded him death. In all probability, he would be made an exception to jump the queue of death convicts and hanged earlier. The issue is: what next? What purpose would the death of a brainwashed butcher really serve? Would it really deter the terrorists, the boys like Kasab from daring to step into the country?

Only the naïve could think so. There is a long established research that death penalty no more serves as deterrent apart from being morally unjustifiable. The developed world has therefore abolished it long back. India for some reason has not done so. Kasab's is a special case. These fidayeens are supposed to be on suicidal missions and only their misfortune could get them captured alive in enemy hands. In that sense, Kasab has been unfortunate that he was caught alive. His misfortune, however, proved immensely valuable to India in understanding the attack. In his absence, going by our intelligence's standard, we would have been merely speculating about it as in scores of other cases. If he is hanged, it just does not serve any purpose except for some people's sense of vicarious vengeance. Does death mean anything to a person who is no more scared of it? These terrorists come prepared for death or are brainwashed to desire death because they believe they would be straight rewarded jannat. Would they be really afraid of India's death sentence? On the contrary, to make such people live, surrounded by a sea of hatred, would be a far severe punishment. If he is alive, India could hope to get more information. But such a rationale would not fit in the jingoist project of the ruling classes.

## Everything Adds to Jingoism

The terror attacks on 26/11 for the first time shook the citadel of the elites symbolised by the Taj and Oberoi hotels. Therefore, one felt it would create serious waves of introspection and a spate of real actions to prevent such incidents in future. The very first reaction it created belied this expectation. The ruling class parties indulged in the battle of billboards with an alibi to salute the martyrs. The media played a leading role in promoting jingoist fervour in the people. There was no trace of realisation that such mindless acts are actually the products of jingoism. It does not make a difference whether jingoism is ours or theirs. Jingoism begets jingoism and is mutually reinforcing. The ruling classes always used it to manufacture people's consent to their interventionist militarism against the imagined enemy. The enemy then could include your own people as a threat to the internal security as the Indian Government has currently defined. Jingoism never lets people realise that such actions are not only used to maintain and reinforce the institutions of militarism, but that they are usually inimical to their own interests. History tells us that apart from religion, jingoism (patriotism and misplaced national pride) have probably been responsible for more mayhem and misery than any other cause in human history. And when patriotism and religion combine to fuel a conflict or a cause, the results are usually lethal.

The menace of terrorism warranted a cool-headed response at the national level-not knee, jerk reactions as we see by our police. Reduced to a petty security syndrome, 26/11 has only served the police to assume totalitarian powers over people to do whatever they want.

# Notion Of Freedom And Reality Of Unfreedom

15 February, 2011

India is a living paradox: a rich country by natural endowment being a home to unparalleled poverty, destitution and misery. It proclaims lofty theses and practices ugliest antitheses. India's liberal Constitution proudly pronounced its preamble in the name of Indian people that they have resolved "to constitute India into a Sovereign, Socialist, Secular, Democratic Republic and to ensure to all its citizens: Justice-social, economic and political; Liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship; Equality of status and of opportunity; and to promote among them all Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the Nation." In reality, the working of the Constitution over the last six decades made it sound like a joke, worse than just an antithesis. While this paradox grew over the years, people reconciled the odds as the price to be paid for democracy and freedom. But from the early 1990s, with the inauguration of neoliberal reforms, they have been experiencing decline of democracy and fast erosion of their freedom. In view of this popular experience these concepts are increasingly problematic.

## The Idea of Freedom

Philosophers from Plato, Kant down to Hegel regarded freedom as real and as having important ontological implications, "for soul or mind or divinity". In philosophy, the idea of freedom comes from the concept of free will. Rudolf Steiner for instance while discussing freedom in his seminal philosophical work *The Philosophy of Freedom* focuses on the concept of free will. According to Steiner freedom can only be approached asymptotically and with the aid of the "creative activity" of thinking. It is the spiritual activity of penetrating with consciousness our own nature and that of the world, and the real activity of acting in full consciousness. Steiner initially divides the problem of free will into freedom of thought and freedom

of action. He argues that inner freedom is achieved when we bridge the gap between our perception, which reflect the outer appearance of the world, and our cognition, which give us access to the inner structure of the world; and that outer freedom arises when we bridge the gap between our ideals and the constraints of external reality, letting our deeds be inspired by what he terms moral imagination. Steiner considers inner and outer freedom as integral to one another, and that true freedom is only achieved when they are united. According to Thomas Hobbes, for example, “a free man is he that... is not hindered to do what he hath the will to do.” Later, freedom was influenced by ideals concerning the social contract as well as arguments that are concerned with the state of nature. It is generally spoken in terms of positive liberty and negative liberty. Positive liberty asserts that freedom is found in a person’s ability to exercise agency, particularly in the sense of having the power and resources to carry out their own will, without being inhibited by the structural inhibitions from society. In the negative sense, one is considered free to the extent to which no person interferes with his or her activity. The major impetus to the idea came from the French Revolution, which according to Hegel constitutes the introduction of real

individual political freedom into European societies for the first time in recorded history. Later, it got wider sanction through the Universal declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) on 10 December 1948 by the United Nations (UN), which championed the right to life, liberty and security of person; the right to education; right to participate fully in cultural life; freedom from torture or cruel, inhumane treatment or punishment and freedom of thought, conscience and religion. The UDHR is based on the “inherent dignity” of all people and affirms the equal rights of all men and women, in addition to their right to freedom. The Declaration gives human rights precedence over the power of the state. While states are permitted to regulate rights, they are prohibited from violating them. As a UN member state, India is bound by the UN Charter, which pledges member states to promote

and encourage respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion, and by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

### **The Genesis of Constitutional Freedom**

In India Freedom came into common parlance through the freedom struggle aimed at driving away the British rulers. It was projected as 'self rule' of Indians but was associated with the exit of the British. As such when the transfer of power did take place in 1947 from the British to the Congress Party, representative of the emergent class of bourgeoisie and landed interests, people were made to rejoice that they were free. The imperative of governance of a diverse polity, divided into innumerable castes, many languages, religions, races, etc and distributed in diverse regions as well as political systems (British India and 500 odd princely states) led to the creation of liberal Constitution with a lofty vision given in its preamble. In any case, the new regime could not retreat from the liberal ethos of the colonial regime and the impact of the Bolshevik revolution. The Constitution proclaimed India to be a republic with sovereignty vested in its people. People were to be its real masters. It was to be a ruse to bring people together to believe in a common destiny of an imaginary nation. The ruling classes were assured by the fact that there wasn't a method to exercise this mastery. It had to be through them or their proxies as representatives of people.

The Constitution of India contained the right to freedom, given in articles 19, 20, 21 and 22, with the view of guaranteeing individual rights that were considered vital. The right to freedom in Article 19 guarantees the following six freedoms: (i) Freedom of speech and expression, (ii) Freedom to assemble peacefully without arms, (iii) Freedom to form associations or unions, (iv) Freedom to move freely throughout the territory of India, (v) Freedom to reside and settle in any part of the territory of India, and (vi) Freedom to practice any profession or to carry on any occupation, trade or business. The constitution also guarantees the right to life and personal liberty,

which in turn cites specific provisions in which these rights are applied and enforced: Protection with respect to conviction for offences is guaranteed in the right to life and personal liberty; Protection of life and personal liberty is also stated under right to life and personal liberty; Rights of a person arrested under ordinary circumstances is laid down in the right to life and personal liberty. In 2002, through the 86th Amendment Act, Article 21(A) was incorporated. It made the right to primary education part of the right to freedom, stating that the State would provide free and compulsory education to children from six to fourteen years of age. The Constitution also imposes restrictions on these freedoms and rights. The restrictions are put in the interest of the independence, sovereignty and integrity of India; morality and public order. The right to life and personal liberty are supposed to be exceptions. However, all the six freedoms are suspended during a state of emergency.

### **The reality of Unfreedom**

The Indian state is bound by the Constitution, the UDHR and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 16 December 1966 and enforced from March 23, 1976 to respect the rights of Indians to freedom. However, going by the experience of majority of people, its track record reflects more of their violation than compliance. The traditional social structure of caste hierarchy that apportioned all rights to upper layers and obligations to lower ones, is in fact reinforced in many ways by the modern constitutional paradigm. The result has been gross negation of rights to the people whom they are most relevant. Although, given the class character of the State, these rights were not fundamentally meant to be observed, their non-observance was apologetically acknowledged until mid 1970s. The political contradictions induced by the post-1947 developmental paradigm led to imposition of emergency for nearly two years during which all rights were suspended. Its lifting in 1977 supposedly restored them but the trend for erosion of freedom was

set in which soon got accelerated with the inauguration of the neoliberal reforms. The crisis unleashed by the elitist strategy over the last two decades has its direct reflection in the dismal state of freedom of people.

Constitutional rights to various freedoms have their direct negation in the reality correlates for the majority of people. Freedom of expression is decimated by the unscrupulous use of sedition laws to curb peoples' democratic descent supplemented by the draconian laws like Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act, 1958, Maintenance of Internal Security Act, 1971, National Security Act, 1980, Preventive Detention Act, 1950, Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2002, Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance, 2001, Terrorist Affected Areas (Special Courts) Act, 1984, Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act, 1985, Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, and so on. Intimately linked with democracy, freedom of expression is constricted to small closeted pockets like Azad maidan in Mumbai or Jantar Mantar in Delhi, surrounded by huge posse of police. The freedoms to assemble and to form associations are generally throttled with the bureaucratic processes and are brutally crushed if they speak about radical change. Freedom of religion is directly threatened by the anti-conversion laws enacted by many states like Gujarat and Karnataka. The naked practice of majoritarian communalism by mainstream parties and tacitly followed by the State has rendered it meaningless. People do have freedom to live anywhere but no more for the poor, who could be harassed with impunity by the outfits like Shiv Sena and MNS in Maharashtra. Freedom to follow any occupation was seriously constrained by the caste ridden social structure and as such was irrelevant for teaming millions. It verily stays so; it is still structurally determined. All the instruments of upliftment (progress) education, land, employment are caste dependent. The state of the freedom of thought gets exposed when the Police arrest people for being Maoists and confiscate the books by Marx, Lenin, Mao, Bhagatsingh and even Ambedkar. While it tolerates Hindutva that has killed thousands



and poisoned the polity to irreparable degree, it would call naxalism as its greatest internal security threat.

In sum, the Indian people suffer extreme unfreedom, both in structure and processes of the State as well as civil society. All that is spoken of freedoms is reserved for a handful of elites, the people in the Constitution, who have made all others as non-people.

# The Neoliberal Revolution

September 17, 2011

Expectedly, the high-pitched media-supported Anna anshan at the Ramlila Ground has come to an end with Parliament passing a unanimous resolution as dictated by Team Anna. The three conditions—that the lower bureaucracy should be within the Lokpal’s ambit, Lokayuktas in States should be brought in through a Central legislation like the Lokpal’s, and a citizen’s charter detailing the responsibilities of government functionaries and the penalty for non-fulfilment should be instituted—were favourably discussed by Parliament but the government initially avoided passing the resolution, retracting its commitment to Team Anna and thus adding one more point to its score of foolishness. Soon thereafter, it retracted again and managed a unanimous resolution in Parliament, which would satisfy Anna Hazare to give up his fast on the 12th day. The media screamed “Anna wins full victory” while Hazare himself cautioned the ecstatic crowds that it was just a half-victory. He announced that he had suspended his fast; his agitation would continue until the Lokpal Bill was passed.

Although the media is still fraught with the Anna euphoria in the absence of some other ‘breaking news’, it is cooling-off on the episode and coming to terms with the fact that it is a long circuitous way to go for getting the Bill passed. In the process ahead whether the Lokpal Bill would really conform to the Jan Lokpal draft, is anybody’s guess. While Parliament’s commitment to the three conditions is of ‘moral’ nature, in the situational context it may be reasonably relied upon. However, since it is linked to the architecture suggested by the Jan Lokpal Bill, it is necessary the final Bill conforms to the latter. As of now there are already nine alternate drafts of the Lokpal Bill, and by the time the Standing Committee considers them, there shall be many more. They will all be considered by the Standing

Committee. In all probability, the final Bill that will be put before the House would significantly differ from the Jan Lokpal Bill, architecturally as well as in contents. Will the entire episode then be repeated once more, after months? Going by Hazare's resolve, the answer is yes; but will that not be dangerous?

Emboldened by the nationwide support he received, he has already announced his next step to take up electoral reforms in demanding inclusion of an option of 'none-of-the-candidates' to exert pressure on the system to have 'good' people in governance. There is no doubt that he would be hugely supported by the burgeoning middle classes in all his moves, now that they saw in him a second Gandhi. But the point is to ponder whether all these legislative reforms will really arrest the craving for accumulation in the dominant classes, legitimised by the neoliberal ethos; which class interests are driving them; and in what way they will serve those interests.

### **Government's Game Plan**

THE government's flip-flops, nay, the series of blunders, has surely facilitated the movement. After tasting success in its high-handed demolition of the Baba Ramdev show at the Ramlila Ground, the government could use force against the crowds that showed up in support of Anna Hazare and possibly demolished it. But it did not do so. If one takes a cursory look at its behaviour right from the beginning of this movement, one could sense an astounding ineptitude of the government in handling it. To start with, it should not have driven Hazare to go on fast. Within hours of sitting on fast, the government began discussing with his team and made a volte-face on its foolish plea that drafting the Bill was the government's prerogative, in making it a part of the joint drafting committee. If it was to be the joint drafting committee, it could have involved representatives of all political parties and pre-empted future hurdles in the process. Not only that it did not do it, but also it made another somersault by rudely abandoning the exercise, discarding the Jan

Lokpal draft under discussion and forwarded its absurdly drafted Bill to the Standing Committee.

When Hazare declared his second spell of fast, the government could easily guess what was in store for it and plan its move in advance. But surprisingly, it became further ludicrous. The Delhi Police, which is controlled by the Central Government, putting unreasonable conditions for the agitators; arresting Hazare and then releasing him, both without any plausible reason; preparing the Ramlila Ground as the venue for his fast; and letting the people's frenzy all over the country reach its zenith over 10 long days, is certainly unbecoming of the government of such a large country. It was too foolish for the government to do so. But was it just foolish as it is seen by most people? It was not an isolated act or acts but a long series of foolish actions, which should prompt suspicion of some game-plan of the government. After all, could the experienced politicians like Pranab Mukherjee, Salman Khurshid, or even Kapil Sibal and Chidambaram, who may appear brash but are certainly not brainless, be so foolish collectively to let it happen? And that too under the leadership of our Oxford-Cambridge educated Prime Minister? It appears unlikely.

With hindsight though one can see this series of apparently foolish actions of the government has only served one purpose: allowing long enough time to build up hysteria all over the country against the political class and government. How could the political class or government scheme against themselves? What could be its possible utility to them? What possible purpose could it serve? One may guess, it serves a definite purpose of the government in building a strong public opinion in the country against the government and the political class dabbling in matters of economy, and therefore, in corollary, in favour of free-market reforms. The uncongenial context of the series of scams, untamed inflation, rising people's movements against various kinds of land grabs, growing unemployment, and so on were exposing the anti-people character of the pro-elite neoliberal policies of the government. The government badly needed a strong voice from among the people that could overcome this anger of the

masses and pave the way for further reforms for which the neoliberal Team Manmohan has been craving.

The Anna movement actually has come as a blessing in disguise for the government to accomplish this. Do not make any mistake, the Lokpal is nothing but essentially a regulator which is prescribed by the neoliberal framework to ensure that the free market operates by certain guidelines. This regulator could be conceived to regulate the political and bureaucrat market so as to keep it attuned to the process of deepening neoliberal reforms. As such Manmohan Singh is not averse to the idea of a Lokpal; he would genuinely want it. It is not because he is concerned about corruption; rather, he is not at all. People were bewildered at his silence when scam after scam unfolded and stunned the country. They do not know that for a hardcore neoliberal, corruption is not an issue at all. It is the grease that lubricates the economic growth machine. After all, it is a part of the market mechanism. If people paid some bribe to get 2G licences and caused the 'notional' loss to the exchequer of Rs 176,000 crores, it was the perceived price the licensees were prepared to pay for the 2G spectrum in the existing market.

The monumental ineptitude exhibited by the government may only be understood by this possible game-plan. The longer the frenzy over the Lokpal lasts, the better it is to create and deepen the resentment against the politically driven status quo and pave the way for the market driven reforms. The government is only worried about creating any structure that would impede these reforms and would surely ensure it will prevail even in the face of euphoric demands. It is not really worried or scared of the Lokpal, because it very well knows that that will just be another wheel for its applecart, which will not change its direction. It is only worried that it should not slow it down.

**BJP the Net Gainer**

THE beauty of India's parliamentary system is that there is essential similarity between all ruling class parties on most core policy matters and behaviours, whether it is economic reforms or foreign policy or secularism and communalism. They differ at the most in shade. In class terms it may thus be called political oligopoly. They would, however, fight against each other to the hilt to capture power. In the current contention between the 'civil society' and the government, the BJP sensed a great opportunity to embarrass the Congress-led UPA and score political points. The pathetic performance of the UPA-II has enlivened its hopes of winning the next elections. On corruption, however, it was not in a position to come clear because of the fear of skeletons tumbling out from its own cupboards, notwithstanding its apologetic defences. It was amusing to watch the TV debates in the wake of this Lokpal imbroglio with the Congress and BJP spokesmen hurling accusations at each other. That rather truly reflected the state of the nation, where corruption is no more an absolute evil but a relative measure. Other regional parties also having tasted meat in some form or other, did not fare any better.

The BJP used every opportunity skilfully in the debate over the Lokpal drafts to embarrass the government, without opening its cards. When Anna Hazare came out on the road, it actively supported him. During his fasts at Jantar Mantar, Raj Ghat and lastly Ramlila, its progenitor, the Sangh Parivar, took an active part in mobilising people. Many people had commented upon its imprint in the picture of Bharat-mata in the form of a Hindu goddess that constituted the backdrop at the Jantar Mantar, strikingly similar to the one used by the Sangh Parivar in their programmes. Although the organisers belonging to India against Corruption might have had Hindutva proclivities (and some people did accuse a few individuals of that) that led them to put up the Bharat mata there, Team Anna by then had incorporated progressive people like Prashant Bhushan, whose secular credentials could not be suspect. The fact that the comments emerged from outsiders and not from the motley crowd is also significant in understanding the character of the crowd. The

slogans of Vande Mataram, Bharat Mata ki Jai and many others reflected the influence of the Sangh Parivar on the crowd.

Although they carried on with their apologetic explanation that the picture of the goddess put up on the stage was actually of mother India and not that of the Hindu goddess, the organisers were embarrassed enough to change it to the picture of Gandhi at the Ramlila Ground. The government's mishandling came handy for the BJP to embarrass the government. The commentators, sans touch with the ground reality, did not see the Anna movement being actively driven by the Sangh Parivar but with every BJP person speaking in unison of her/his support to the movement halfway through testifies to this truth. At many places people have noted the Sangh pracharaks actively mobilising people to participate in their processions and demonstrations. Ashok Singhal of the VHP proudly claimed that they had provided free food to the people gathered at the Ramlila Ground. Insofar as the BJP aimed at embarrassing the government, it accomplished it in full measure. Both ways, in terms of preparing the general public opinion in favour of further neoliberal reforms as the government perhaps wanted, and in the process causing embarrassment to the government, the BJP was the gainer.

### **Alienation of Masses**

WHILE the crowds surged with every passing day in support of Anna, it was mainly drawn from the middle class segment of the population, which could be described as urbane, English- educated, upper-caste, upwardly mobile young people. The frontal organisations of the Sangh Parivar also significantly contributed to the swelling crowd. This is the neoliberal generation of India, most of them having grown up during the last two decades, seeing the Indian economy growing at an impressive rate. They do not share the shame and apology for India that their elders had because of her so-called Hindu rate of growth which refused to transcend the 3.5 per cent marker and visible poverty. The times this generation lived through was marked by the 'licence-permit raj', domination of the public

sector, rise of the backward castes, and cultural build-up of the lowest strata of Dalits. Although the government policy had systematically been driven towards capitalist development without in anyway denting the feudal classes, and in the interests of bourgeoisie, the Nehruvian rhetoric had succeeded in creating an impression that it was pursuing a socialist path. During the Cold War period, its association with the USSR and consequent annoyance of the US camp also strengthened this impression. The Nehruvian project did aspire to see India emerge as a modern nation shunning its decadent traditions and customs. People tended to intellectually believe that India needed to change its belief-system and culture, and carried a sense of apology for the past. Although it did not make much dent to the practice, nobody, except the hardline Hindu, could dare to justify the caste system, communalism, religious rituals, gods and godmen in public.

The neoliberal era began informally with Indira Gandhi taking the then biggest loan from the IMF of \$ 5 billion immediately after her second coming, that was soon identified with Rajiv Gandhi after her assassination, and formally in July 1991 under the Narasimha Rao Government which brought in a systematic reversal in the previous trend. The 'free-market' propaganda of the global capital appeared sensible in rescuing the world economy in crisis, which was associated with the statist blockade. The decline of the socialist regimes also boosted the belief. The Indian economy generally began looking up with visible markers of 'development' like foreign brands being freely available in the Indian market, foreign models of cars appearing on roads. The reversal of the economic trend created reversal of the apologetic thinking of India. India's emergence as a major player in the IT sector, Indian professionals in the US gaining prominence, whether as a cause or consequence, rather enhanced the pride in 'India'. The young people generally blamed their parents' generation and the ideological baggage of socialism for the recent past and believed in the intrinsic superiority of India, along with all its customs, tradition and belief-system. Caste, communalism,



religious rituals, culture and tradition, which were being apologetically spoken about, began to be openly justified in public. This reversal overlapped with the Hindutva ideology. This has been one of the major factors behind the BJP's rise from oblivion to political power in the 1990s.

These policies being inherently elitist, they helped the typical upper-caste, English and technical educated youth of cities and towns in constituting a rising middle class. It imagined India as an emerging superpower and in its superficial ways identified political and bureaucratic corruption, the overall system of governance, and perhaps the Constitution that dampened 'meritocracy' as hurdles in its path. The huge support that the Jan Lokpal campaign received from this segment could be understood in this manner. While they would like freeing India from these evils, this segment, true to its class character, cannot stomach the idea of thorough overhaul of the system, a la a revolution that, say, the Maoists want to bring about. The Maoists also speak in the name of the people, the vast majority of the toiling people who are rendered invisible by the neoliberal onslaught. The social engineering, non-violence, civil society, people's power are the typical wordy armour of this class which tend to exclude those who are not part of them. It is natural that the lower strata, certainly the Dalits, Adivasis, minorities and artisan castes untied to the dominant castes, do not identify with their show and rather would oppose it even in an aberrant manner.

It is not that they favour the current governance or like corruption. Being the biggest victims of these evils, they would rather want them to be rooted out. But they do see the campaign being driven with class interests inimical to theirs and not particularly aimed at eradication of these evils. The legislation of Acts has been a veritable means to pacify them at various times. Take, for instance, the enactment of the Atrocity Act, which aimed at curbing the incidence of caste atrocities against SCs and STs. What is the reality? Since its enactment, the caste atrocities have rather consistently risen. Take another case of the much acclaimed Right to Education Act. This Act

in reality has taken away the inherent constitutional right of the poor children to get education in common schools and rather legitimised the multi-layered education system that was introduced under the neoliberal ethos. The result of it will be soon seen in the huge disempowerment of the entire rural people in general and the SCs and STs in particular. The crowds at Ramlila thought (indeed it is reported as such in a section of the press) that these ‘undeserving’ people do not have brains. They shouted provocative slogans and held placards that reservations were the root cause of all corruption. Some of their key leaders were reported to have been associated with the anti-reservation campaigns. An editor of one Hindi periodical, ‘Diamond India’, Bhanwar Meghawanshi has listed many such provocations in his article ‘Why Are Dalits Not Enthusiastic About Anna’s Movement?’ Provocation apart, there has not been any remote reference to the caste culture which could be easily discerned as the mother of moral corruption or the neoliberal policies of the government which can be directly linked to the kind of corruption that provoked the campaign. The complete tone and tenor of the campaign was slanted against the lower strata of the society which, though invisible on TV channels, constitute the vast majority of this country. Team Anna wanted to dispel this impression in a symbolical manner, again ironically borrowed from the Sangh Parivar’s repertoire, by being offered coconut water to break his fast through two girls, one a Dalit and the other a Muslim. It needed to know that alienation of these communities has gone a little deeper to be dispelled by such a stereotypical symbolism.

### **Lokpal as a Saviour**

NOBODY can oppose the need to strengthen the mechanism to curb corruption in the country. But to believe that something like the new oligarchic set-up of Lokpal will do the magic, just because it worked in Scandinavia and other such countries, is unjustified. Most Acts in most countries are essentially similar but the result they produce is drastically different. It has to do with the cultural paradigm in which they work. There is a case to take cognisance of these issues at this

stage. Corruption can be seen as the outcome of the power asymmetry in society; unlike other societies it appears qualitatively endemic to our caste culture with its rigid hierarchies. This culture has produced the doublespeak of the elite, expressing altruistic concern for the people but at the same time continuing with their exploitation. It is an integral part of our culture that distinguishes us as arguably the most corrupt people in the world. India's corruption ranking by Transparency International also does not catch this reality. The African countries that appear more corrupt than us by those ranks were also basically taught corruption by the Indian migrants. The Swiss Banking Association report of 2008 had indicated (mysteriously it is not being mentioned anymore these days) a whopping \$ 1891 billion of Indian black money deposits in the Swiss bank, more than all the black money deposits of all countries in the world. This perhaps best portrays our character. The remedy therefore becomes eradicating socio-economic inequality from the society. The Lokpal prescription does not reflect this diagnosis of the disease and instead focuses on the mere symptom.

Anna and his team believe that 50-60 per cent of corruption can be eliminated if their Lokpal is installed. The entire premise of the campaign is on creating an independent and incorruptible agency, which will curb corruption from the entire political class and bureaucracy. Theoretically speaking, constitution of such an agency itself is next to impossible because in our culture those in public prominence, from amongst whom such a selection would be made, cannot be conceived to be beyond corruption; the honest and sincere people having been thrown out of the arena. Paradoxically, they may be found in Indian jails charged under the Sedition Act. Many people have raised genuine issues in regard to its practicability and efficacy and they cannot be just ignored. The Lokpal or Jan Lokpal will be one more oligarchic institution to be borne by the toiling masses of this country. Take, for example, any of the recent scams and ask a simple question: would the Lokpal have really deterred these scamsters? Would this Bill have prevented the CWG scam, the NTRO

scam, the CVC appointment or any of the recent embarrassments? Only the incorrigible optimist might answer the question in the affirmative.

The kind of corruption Team Anna speaks about also has its identifiable source but it scrupulously avoided speaking about it. The Global Financial Integrity (GFI) study titled “The drivers and dynamics of illicit financial flows from India: 1948-2008” by economist Dev Kar estimates that out of \$ 462 billion siphoned out of India during the last 61-year period, 68 per cent is attributable to the post-reform period of just 18 years. There are many such country studies and acknowledgement from the protagonists of neoliberalism itself that confirm that neoliberal policies have caused the new genre of corruption. Instead of pointing at this source, the Lokpal campaign rather effectively diverted the people’s attention from it. Let Anna undertake fast unto death for stopping the economic reforms of the government in order to curb corruption and then see how many people come to Ramlila and what way the state reacts! Instead of identifying the prevailing structure and system as the source of corruption, the campaign is focusing on individuals, forgetting the fundamental dictum that individual behaviour is largely of the situation and less of the self. This country has been after saviours for far too long. We had many saviours; every caste and community has its own. The middle classes found their saviour in Anna Hazare to cleanse this country of evils. They propose the saviour in the Lokpal. Saviours have come and gone; the only thing that they did was to damage the consciousness of the people that it is they who are the harbingers of change.

## **Conclusion**

ANNA HAZARE, a simple old man, that benevolent chieftain of sorts from a remote village, who has earned a certain reputation by pursuing causes that he believed in steadfastly, has come up at the

national level as a miracle man through this movement. But the credit for the miracle halfway through must go to the media that worked relentlessly to build up and project his image. The media, which easily adopts a holier than thou kind of attitude, can itself be marked for corruption in its omissions and commissions. That it is a business, pure and simple, conducted with certain business strategy is a settled question. Even in earlier times, notwithstanding its pretensions to responsibility and ethics, it was a business. But then the business strategy had a dimension called the 'long term' which impelled the media to establish its credibility and ethical image, ignoring the lures of the short term. Now, the product life-cycles have become so small that this long term has almost disappeared from the strategy consideration and the short term has overtaken everything. The media therefore unabashedly seeks revenue maximisation through TRP and for that goes to any extent manufacturing news. Taking its social consequences, this very process itself can be condemned as corruption. But who will say this to whom when the media controls the entire communication in our age? The enormous power the media wields can easily create miracles of the kind out of practically anything, if it finds the potential to serve its own interests.

As discussed above, this movement has steered clear of the root causes of the disease of corruption and pitched its prescriptions around corruption as a symptom. It is also indicated that if it had done the former, it would have never got the kind of support it received. Such simplistic and superficial diagnosis of social matters is characteristic of the neoliberal ideology and fits well with the class character of the middle classes who like just a patch-work solution that can bring them incremental benefits while preserving what they already have. Instinctively they are scared of going to the roots of the problem because that would demand a radical overhaul of the system which could threaten their own possession. Taking the aspirations and frustrations of this class, this movement had just the right mix to attract it. Their perception of corruption is constricted; it is limited to the politicians and bureaucracy. They would not, even by mistake,

touch the corporations and businessmen who are the main feeders, the fountainhead of this corruption. They would not similarly touch NGOs of various hues that are conduits of the neoliberal ideology and yes, the media.

The greatest success of the movement lies in galvanising the neoliberal middle class, which generally remained apathetic to politics, to make a statement on the road. They have effectively created an illusion that the system could be 'revolutionised' by introducing legislative reforms like the Lokpal and changes in the election system or bringing in 'good' people in place of bad ones. They attempt to thwart the possibility of revolt which the situation is fast driving people to. The campaign has already prevented people from seeing the real rot in the system; the nature of the disease and diverted their attention to the symptom. Many people called it a revolution, not knowing what stuff revolutions are made of. Well, if it qualifies to be a revolution, we may as well have to call it a neoliberal revolution!

# Babasaheb Ambedkar and the Neoliberal Economic Reforms

April 14, 2012

When the International Monetary Fund and World Bank-dictated neoliberal policy package was adopted by the Narasimha Rao Government in July 1991, with a false projection to the people that those were homegrown economic reforms, albeit with a Thatcherite apologia that ‘there was no alternative’, many intellectuals, whether they understood economics or not, vied with each other in supporting it to get into the good books of the government. Economics has by and large been an outcaste in Dalit intellectual universe because it was identified with Communists (economism) with two weird syllogisms propa-gated by the vested interests. One, Communists were materialist; economics related with things material, so it was communist. Second, Ambedkar was against Communists. Dalits are followers of Ambedkar. So, Dalits should keep away from economics. (None of these statements are correct but they are bandied as self-sustaining truth.) They proudly claimed that our struggle is not for bread (alone), it is for dignity. As a result, there was no particular popular appeal among Dalits of discussion on economic policy. Still some ambitious elements from among them had thrust their neck out speaking in support of these anti-people policies. All of them are expectedly duly awarded by the government. I had taken them as an act of opportunism and dealt with as such. But later, these things began coming in a more virulent form, like the campaign for Dalit Capitalism, or Dalit Chamber of Commerce, or mutating Ambedkar as the free-market economist, with due institutional support from abroad like the Misses Institute, the source institution of the neoliberal virus.

Recently an ignoramus feigning to have discovered a profound aspect of Dr Ambedkar presented a paper titled “Ambedkar—The Forgotten

Free-Market Economist”<sup>3</sup> at the Ludwig von Mises Institute. Unfortunately, Dalits, who exhibit their bhakti towards Ambedkar such as by insisting that he should be referred to only as “Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar” each and every time, would not understand that calling him a free-market economist is the worst abuse that can be hurled at him. Rather, it is beyond abuse, and is an attempt at character assassination. Indeed, it is a pity that despite a plethora of writings on Ambedkar, the Dalits have not understood even what he stood for. Framed in this contemporary context, this article will strive to explicate the salient aspects of Ambedkar’s thoughts in relation to the current neoliberal paradigm.

### **Understanding Free Market**

MARKET is where things are exchanged with the help of money, the medium of exchange. Obviously, market valorises the customer and in proportion of his purchasing power, that is, the amount of money he has in his pockets. Markets have been around from antiquity as a mechanism for facilitating exchange of goods and services among people in order to satisfy their needs because of the fact that all that is needed for living cannot be produced by any man or family. The villagers produced vegetables but would not have oil or salt necessary for cooking them and therefore went to a haat (village market) to exchange his excess vegetables against oil and salt. Initially he simply bartered but later money played the role of a facilitator. The advent of money not only facilitated the transaction but also accumulation. One could not amass grains or salts because they needed storage and suffered depreciation but money could be stored without limits and instead of suffering depreciation, it appreciated. More perniciously, it facilitated what is known as the free market, the free play of the purchasing power of people.

Free market basically assumes that seller and buyer in the market are all equal, endowed with equal amount of information and therefore the exchange between them takes place purely on the basis of the perceived value of the thing exchanged. Now in a real world,



arguably created by the elements of the free market itself (that allowed accumulation by some beyond their needs and thereby exercise power over others, both money as well as informational) this assumption becomes quite problematic. With the given inequality of the people in the marketplace the free market becomes a mechanism of exploitation. A single or a few sellers coming together and dictating the price of goods or services is commonly known as monopoly and oligopoly, respectively. The markets are flaunted by free marketeers as the most efficient means to allocate resources through the price mechanism that balances out demand and supply. But the demand and supply could be both manipulated by the powerful and the entire mechanism could be used as a means not of allocating resources but of accumulation. Of course, there are many situations known to economics as market failures, which can be viewed as scenarios where the individual's pursuit of pure self-interest leads to results that are not efficient—that can be improved upon from the societal point of view. The people who extend the concept of the market as a simple mechanism to exchange things to the free market, which could be said to be their ideological obsession, are thus either committing a conceptual error or making a deliberate mischief.

### **Misreading “The Problem of Rupee”**

THE sole source of Ambedkar's characterisation as a monetarist or free-market or neoliberal economist is the misreading, or, shall we say, mischievous reading, of his D.Sc thesis—The Problem of Rupee. Here Ambedkar presents his analysis of the contemporary problem of currency standards, namely, gold standard versus gold exchange standard. He forcefully makes a case for the former (gold standard), going against the mainstream economists' opinions, including that of John Maynard Keynes. Ambedkar basically makes the case for the stability of currency in the gold standard and marshalls arguments that unstable currency could lead to unbridled inflation because of the fiscal profligacy of the government, which disproportionately burdens the lower strata of the society through consequential price

rise. This is the central point of the thesis. There are stray observations in the thesis against the wastefulness of the public servant vis-à-vis the private agent or such statements as market mechanism for value determination. The central thesis being rooted in the then situational context, it is really no place to seek his ideological proclivities towards or against socialism. To do so is utterly foolish.

If one looks beyond to the kind of influences the young Ambedkar carried, we get rather a better picture. In Columbia, some of his teachers were American Fabians. John Dewey, who had left a particularly deep impression on young Ambedkar, was a famous American Fabian. Prof Dewey particularly endeared Ambedkar because of his anxiety to help the downtrodden, to do away with oppression in America and elsewhere, and to propose the instrumentality of education in their emancipation. The influence of Dewey on Ambedkar was so deep that as late as in June 1952, in a letter written to his wife Mrs Savita Ambedkar from America, where the honorary degree LL.D. was conferred upon him by the Columbia University for drafting the Constitution of India, he acknowledged it saying: "I owe my whole intellectual life to Prof John Dewey." He variously acknowledged this intellectual debt to Dewey in his later life.

Fabianism, born in 1884 along with the foundation of the Fabian Society, a British socialist movement whose purpose was to advance the principles of democratic socialism via gradualist and reformist, rather than revolutionary, means, had attracted many liberal thinkers beyond England. Fabians as such were the quintessential socialists but did not subscribe to the revolutionary theories of Marxism. Instead, they believed that socialism could be brought about in an evolutionary manner. The London School of Economics, in which Ambedkar studied and wrote "The Problem of Rupee", his thesis for his D.Sc. degree, was founded by the Fabian Society and was acknowledged as the fortress of Fabianism. The key figures of the Fabian society like Bernard Shaw, Sydney and Beatrice Webb were

among the founders of the LSE and they were the faculty in the LSE. Therefore, the intellectual context in which Ambedkar carried out his research was also socialist. The slogan “Educate, Agitate, Organise”, that he chose as the motto of the Bahishkrit Bharat and later gave to his disciples as his mantra, was actually a famous Fabian slogan. It bespeaks poor of the quality of research on Ambedkar that this important aspect of his ideology still remains largely submerged. If one objectively looks at his entire life, one would see the Fabian influence informing much of his ideological position.

To read in his thesis monetarism—that was formally born in 1960, nearly four decades later and after he had left the world—is simply preposterous. It is true that before the advent of Keynesianism, the economists belonged to the classical school that believed in the self-adjusting market mechanism and saw no role for the government, either in terms of monetary or fiscal policy. There should be little doubt that all economists, including Ambedkar, operated in this larger context of classical economics prior to the 1930s. In order to respond to the great depression of the 1930s, Keynes came out with theories that proposed an important role to the government through fiscal policy to create aggregate demand in the economy. Keynesianism saved capitalism from its imminent collapse and became a default economic creed for the post-war world. It not only saved capitalism but also gave it its ‘golden era’. But when capitalism began to face another bout of crises in the 1960s, the monetarist counterrevolution took place against the ruling Keynesianism, led by Milton Friedman, an economist from the Chicago School, arguing against the fiscal policy and proposing instead monetary policy as an instrument for altering the output and employment levels in the economy. It mainly modified some aspects of the classical theory to provide the rationale for his non-interventionist policy recommendation in favour of free market. It should be noted that the belief in the self-adjusting market of classical economics is not the same as the monetarist position of the free market. It is simply

mischievous to see Ambedkar as a proponent of the free-market economy and particularly against socialism.

### A Socialist to the Core

I think anybody who claims to know Babasaheb Ambedkar even superfluously is familiar with his statement:

*“My social philosophy may be said to be enshrined in three words: liberty, equality and fraternity. My philosophy has roots in religion and not in political science. I have derived them from the teachings of my master, the Buddha.”*

Indeed, these three words constituted his vision for the human destiny and the biggest rationale for his conversion to Buddhism. What could they mean? The world knows that these words constituted an inspiration, a veritable slogan of the French Revolution and also that they are nowhere to be found in Buddhism, where Ambedkar claimed to have taken them from. The import of his claim lies in the fact that in the French Revolution they remained mere slogans for the bourgeoisie but in Buddhism they are found with their spirit and full content. He envisioned human society to reflect them in full measure as Buddha did. It could be imagined only as an ideal, a utopia. Marx imagined the ultimate destiny of humans in the form of communism, where the most familiar contra-dictions would have been overcome and humans will contribute as per their capacity and get what they need. Do these visions not coincide? If so, socialism, as the Marxian historical materialism guides us, is the penultimate stage to communism. Ambedkar's ideological position may have to be reckoned as beyond socialism quite like Marx's.

There are some who capitalise on his contention with Communists and communism paint him as anti-Marxist and anti-everything that Marx stood for. In doing so, they do not hesitate pushing him into the enemy camp. To say that he was pro-capitalist, pro-globalisation, and pro-free-market system is equivalent of doing so. As explained,

Ambedkar was influenced by his Professors at Columbia and the London School of Economics at the impressionable age; while wanting socialism, he had reservations with the Marxian prescription of revolution. While Ambedkar reflected a similar attitude towards Marxism, he regarded it as the benchmark, a veritable measure to assess the superiority of his methods. Whether one agrees with this observation or not, there is absolutely no space for doubt that he was a socialist. Not in ideological orientation alone but also in practice he had openly pursued socialist objectives all through his life. His first political party, the Independent Labour Party, was fashioned on the lines of the Labour Party in England, which was again a Fabian political outfit. Even before that he famously identified two enemies of the Untouchables: Brahmanism and Capitalism. In fact, at the symbolic level, the class characterisation of our society by the radical Left, as “semi-feudal, semi-colonial”, could echo this declaration. The ILP, as a matter of fact, was admittedly a workers’ party, which had adopted a red flag, inspired by the socialist objective. It was the ILP which demonstrated on roads how caste and class could be collapsed into a struggle.

Despite its success, he had to abandon the overtly Left politics of the ILP mainly because politics was taking a purely communal turn. The Cripps Mission report, published in February 1942, which, while conceding most demands of other minorities, had totally ignored the interests of the Untouchables as they had remained unre-presented, became the direct trigger. It compelled him to rethink his strategy, dissolve the ILP and found the seemingly caste-based party, the Scheduled Caste Federation in June 1942. It coincided with his inclusion in the Viceroy’s Executive Council. Although striving to emancipate the Untouchables in the contemporary communally charged politics, it should be remembered that he penned a remarkable document, meant to be the memorandum to the Constituent Assembly on behalf of the SCF. This document, later published as “States and Minorities”, by his own definition proposed state socialism in post-colonial India.

One of the arguments in support of how Ambedkar was against socialism, the pseudo-scholar, who abused Ambedkar as the free-market economist, proffered was that he was against the inclusion of the word 'socialism' in the Constitution. He ought to have firstly understood that the Constitution is not a book authored by him; it was a document representing the consensus of the Constituent Assembly. It was his job to bring about that consensus. All his arguments in the Constituent Assembly should be read within this role boundary. With regard to the inclusion of socialism in the Constitution, there is fortunately a direct statement from him, which distinctly dispels such doubts:

“What should be the policy of the State, how the Society should be organised in its social and economic side are matters, which must be decided by the people themselves according to time and circumstances. It cannot be laid down in the Constitution itself, because that is destroying democracy altogether. If you state in the Constitution that the social organisation of the State shall take a particular form, you are, in my judgement, taking away the liberty of the people to decide what should be the social organisation in which they wish to live. It is perfectly possible today for the majority people to hold that the Socialist organisation of society is better than the Capitalist organisation of society. But it would be perfectly possible for thinking people to devise some other form of social organisation which might be better than the socialist organisation of today or of tomorrow. I do not see therefore why the Constitution should tie down the people to live in a particular form and not leave it to the people themselves to decide it for themselves.” [Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar, Writings and Speeches, Vol. 13, p. 326]

After explaining why he was not in favour of inclusion of the word socialism, he himself explained that in other ways the Constitution has already embodied the socialist principles: “...apart from the Fundamental Rights, which we have embodied in the Constitution, we have also introduced other sections, which deal with directive principles of State policy. If my Honourable friend were to read the

Articles contained in Part IV, he will find that both the Legislature as well as the Executive have been placed by this Constitution under certain definite obligations as to the form of their policy. Now, to read only Article 31, which deals with this matter:

“It says: ‘The State shall, in particular, direct its policy towards securing—

- i) That the citizens, men and women equally, have the right to an adequate means of livelihood;
- ii) That the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best to sub serve the common good;
- iii) that the operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment;
- iv) That there is equal pay for equal work for both men and women;.....’ “There are some other items more or less in the same strain. What I would like to ask Professor Shah is this: If these directive principles to which I have drawn attention are not socialistic in their direction and in their content, I fail to understand what more socialism can be.

“Therefore my submission is that the socialist principles are already embodied in our Consti-tution and it is unnecessary to accept this amendment.” [Ibid., pp. 326-327]

In his one of the very last public addresses at Kathmandu, he had compared Buddhism with Marxism. It reveals that he had regarded Marxism as just the second best to his choice. In this comparison, he clearly states that while the goal of both was the same, the Buddha’s prescriptions were superior to those of Marx, in terms of non-violence and democracy. The goal was to bring about equitable society sans oppression and exploitation which was only possible in a socialist society. Rather both, Marx as well as Ambedkar went beyond and sought a utopia beyond socialism. In any case, such a state of society was inherently impossible in capitalism which is premised on the accumulation drive, the unbridled greed of a man. Capitalism or its contemporary extremist version in neoliberalism,

advocating the free-market economy, does not have any pretension to social justice. Rather it justifies injustice saying that people occupy various positions in societal hierarchy purely in accordance with their capabilities or that inequality is desirable because it acts as the prime mover of progress. Nothing can be more preposterous than saying that Ambedkar supported such inequality-justifying systems such as capitalism or neoliberal globalisation. Even the argument that capitalism being more progressive than caste-feudalism, that it basically freed labour from the feudal bondage, which had impelled Marx to predict that advent of capitalism in India will destroy the caste system, would not hold because Ambedkar saw capitalism and Brahmanism not only coexisting but also cohabiting, mutually complementing. Ambedkar explicitly said more than once that he was a socialist. If someone feigns ignorance of this he should not be speaking about Ambedkar.

### **Ambedkar and Globalisation**

AT the outset, to speak about Ambedkar in relation to globalisation, which represents a paradigmatic transformation of global capitalism into its extremist version, is fundamentally speculative. But there are enough fools who rush in where angels fear to tread. Since they cannot rationally justify their support to globalisation, they have been awkwardly invoking Ambedkar, speculating that if he had lived, he would have supported globalisation. In any case, there being so little knowledge about economic policies, the gullible listeners tend to believe these tricksters, who pretend intellectual prowess and already enjoy some social reputation. It is futile to engage with them at such a speculative level. However, if we understand what globalisation is, we can objectively assess where Ambedkar would stand vis-à-vis globalisation.

Globalisation is an extremist version of resurgent liberalism in retaliation to its century-long marginalisation by the communist challenge and Keynesianism. It is basically premised on extreme individualism, competition as the prime mover of progress, and the



free market as its prototype. Pitching every individual thus in competition with the rest of the world, it follows the social Darwinist justification for inequality, exploitation, and social injustice. While it is thus biased in favour of the rich and powerful in relation to the poor masses, in its ruthless logic it favours the winner and discards the losers. Therefore, in its proclivities it is absolutely unsustainable. Translated into an economic policy package, it is familiarly known as privatisation, deregulation, liberalisation without any concern for the weak and poor. It has been a veritable strategy of global capital enabled by the information and communication technologies and emboldened by the collapse of the erstwhile Soviet regime. It manifests itself in the form of the process of accumulation by dispossession, unmindful of the consequences to the survival of the human race itself. People are being denuded of their meagre possession all over the world, bringing everything into the market net. While the state is being used to facilitate these processes of accumulation of global capital, it is being withdrawn as the provider of the social goods such as education, health care, etc. to the people.

If this is the character of globalisation, would Ambedkar, whose vision was to see human destiny in the ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity, support it? If anything can be conceived as ideologically opposite to Ambedkar, it would rather be globalisation.

### **Globalisation and Dalits**

PERHAPS Dalits, who are fed on the identitarian diet, would not be impressed by the picture of devastation globalisation created the world over. For instance, there is no dispute that inequalities have risen with unprecedented rates everywhere in almost direct proportion to the degree of free-market policies the countries followed. Loss of jobs, democratic spaces, habitat, environment and social security for vast masses of people are rampantly observed everywhere. But identity-obsessed Dalits would not relate with it. They will still argue that they are a different people faced with the unique problem of caste and all the heaps of contra-evidence do not

mean any-thing to them. Although it is most unfortunate that Dalits should be so sectarian in their attitude, one is impelled by these arguments to focus on the specifics of the problems Dalits faced.

With the heuristic that the adverse impact of globalisation is felt by people in inverse proportion to their placement in the social hierarchy, it would not be difficult to see that Dalits are the most affected people. But such things also may not appeal to Dalits. In order to assess its impact therefore, we could consider a comprehensive framework, what I would call a project of their emancipation. This project can be conceived in terms of four empowerments: 1. individual empowerment, 2. socio-economic empowerment, 3. socio-political empowerment, and 4. socio-cultural empowerment. If these four empowerments are accomplished, one would reasonably say that the emancipation of Dalits is achieved. We identify the salient proxy variables mapping each of these four empowerments: education and health for individual empowerment, land reforms and jobs for socio-economic empowerment, democratisation for socio-political empowerment, and modernity for socio-cultural empowerment. Now we can meaningfully assess the impact of globalisation on each of these proxy variables in a systematic and somewhat scientific manner.

The greatest impact on the people comes through the withdrawal of the state from its obligation towards the people and privatisation of what was public. Education, marked as the greatest enabler, is getting increasingly out of the reach of Dalits. One sees rampant commercialisation of the sector with multilayered quality catering to different segments of the education market. It quite corresponds with the caste hierarchies that existed in olden times. Health services were already one of the most privatised sectors in the country; now they have almost disappeared from the public domain. As regards land reforms, the entire discourse has vanished and is rather replaced by corporate land grab in the garb of development. It has verily manifested into significant land loss and increasing landlessness of Dalits in villages. Jobs are fast disappearing. The public sector jobs, which were

accessible to Dalits, have been fast decreasing since 1997, effectively marking the end of reservation there. As regards democracy, it has only remained in its symbolic façade of elections, offering little real choice to the people. Outside elections, there is no space for the people to express their opinion or dissent. The slightest indication of dissent invites a Naxal or Maoist tag which is being stuck on the Dalit youth with impunity to destroy their life. The last one, modernity, which means transcending the decadent traditions and customs whatever their source may be, and adopting the scientific outlook, could be complex in explanation because of the dominant discourse that associates cultural universalisation in globalisation. That has not been true however. The true processes can be characterised by hybridisation; globalisation and such likes, which means that globalisation rather assimilates what is valued by the elite in their locale with the dominant global cultural resources. As such, all the old traditions and customs of Hindus including castes, which were apologetically spoken about until the 1980s, have resurged with a vengeance. The neoliberal generation now speaks about them with pride. If caste atrocities are taken as the indicator of casteism (and I would take it as the best indicator), one will have to infer that casteism is on definite rise during the period of globalisation.

Thus, we can see that globalisation has damaged comprehensively what could be called the emancipation project of Dalits. There will certainly be stray Dalit individuals who have immensely benefited from it. Globalisation is structurally oriented to benefit stray elements, creating an impression that individuals can achieve anything if they possess the wherewithal to compete. The campaigners of Dalit capitalism, Dalit bourgeoisie, or Dalit Chambers of Commerce and other such things do not have a simple understanding of the size of the problem; leave apart the principle that adopting the enemy ideology is simply suicidal.

## Conclusion

BABASAHEB AMBEDKAR occupies an important space in the Dalit psyche. He represents their ideal, ideology and supreme. Nothing that is not compatible with him could be considered by Dalits. But this assessment is mediated by the vested interests in various garbs. They have already iconised him in reactionary ways among the masses. The assessment of anything then tends to take place with reference to this icon. It follows that if it is not attuned to this icon, it is summarily rejected and vice versa, even in the face of contrary experience of the masses. Globalisation is one such phenomenon that has been around for nearly two decades and a majority of Dalits have actually suffered its ill-effects. But still they do not reflect summary abhorrence for it simply because it is shown to be something supportable by the Ambedkar icon. Dalits need to primarily understand this fact and extricate the real radical Ambedkar as their guide and beacon. The radical Ambedkar is surely the socialist Ambedkar, who was in relentless search of truth, of the way which will lead the world to sustainability and humans to their utopia marked by him with three ideals, liberty, equality and fraternity. Even if this is squarely internalised by Dalits, they would have extricated him from the reactionary marsh created by the vested interests.

Globalisation has been the euphemistic term for the imperialist strategy of global capital. In essence it is capitalism, but an extremist version of it, which disregards its own sustainability in pursuit of unbridled profits. Capitalism had internalised the limits of exploitation of surplus value from labour insofar as the latter needed to be provided with the wherewithal for reproduction and also the purchasing power to buy his finished products. Globalisation, intoxicated with technology, completely undermined labour and has been out to discard it or dispossess it of whatever little it had. It basically desires extermination of the majority of people, the rejects of the market, that parasitically consume the planet's resources. There is no intellect required to assess that such a creed or a system would be an anathema to Babasaheb Ambedkar.

# Butchery Of Dalits In Paramakudi

12 October, 2011

*(A Press Note for the Press Meet on 4 October 2011 at Chennai Press Club)*

The news of police firing on Dalits, congregated at Paramakudi to observe the 54 th anniversary of the martyrdom of their leader Emmanuel Sekaran, killing six of them and injuring scores of them, just within four months from Ms J Jayalalitha regaining her power, shocked the entire nation. The Tamilnadu based Centre for Protection of Civil Liberties took an initiative to constitute an all India team to do the fact finding into the incident. Accordingly a team comprising Priyadarshini of Democratic Students Union, New Delhi; Lakshmi Prasanna of Caste Annihilation Liberation Front; Advocates Murugan and Kesavan and S. Gopal of Centre for Protection of Civil Liberties, and Dr Anand Teltumbde of Committee for Protection of Democratic Rights, Mumbai visited Paramakudi, Manjoor, Keelakodumbaloor, Sadayaneeri, and Veerambal; Patam, Puliur, Chintamani Junction; Apollo hospital in Madurai; met with eye witnesses, victims' families, injured persons and state authorities—district collectors of Ramnad and Madurai districts; RDO and Tehsildar, Paramakudi over the two days, i.e., 2 nd and 3 rd October 2011. Taking stock of all the facts, the committee has come to a conclusion that the police action was not only unprovoked but was rather preplanned to serve the larger political interests of the ruling party.

The facts of the case are simple enough. Since there are a couple of good videos available of the entire episode, they could be even treated as incontrovertible. Despite this the incident is largely projected in the media as per the police version. In the morning of 11 th September people began gathering at Paramakudi like previous years. The administration had taken usual steps to divert traffic from Madurai to Ramnad through the bypass road. The festive mood of the

gathering that was swelling with time at the Five Cross Road at Paramakudi junction was usual. Everything was usual as in previous years but for the crowd that has been growing over the last 50 odd years and the disproportionately big police posse with all its paraphernalia. There was nothing untoward until suddenly police burst into action at around 11.30 am with lathi charge, pushing people towards Mudukullatur road. The people had retreated but were still chased by the police, which enraged people and began throwing stones at police. Suddenly anti-riot armored vehicle –Vajra, was brought in and police began firing on the crowd. All the people who died of gun shots and injured in firing were hit far above the waist. The situation seemingly was brought under control within an hour or so. By then four people had been killed and several injured. Police did not take care of the dead or wounded. Many people who survived said they were carried by their friends to the hospital.

Surprisingly in the evening after 3 pm, the police again went berserk picking up people randomly from the junction up to the railway crossing, which is half a kilometer away from the scene. They picked up some 18 youth, brought them to the police van and beat so brutally that two people died there itself. Others were beaten in the van as well as Ilayangudi police station to have multiple fractures and broken skulls. Most were left at Ilayangudi Government Hospital where they remained untreated before they were taken to other hospitals after hours. Many injured in earlier lathi charge and bullet injuries were carried by their friends and acquaintances and did not figure in any records.

At Madurai, there was not any iota of an excuse for the police to use weapon but still they fired upon people grievously injuring two students. The people of Puliyur had started in an open lorry basically because the buses they paid advance to had backed out reportedly at the instance of the police. They were stopped at the Chintamani junction, barely two kilometers away from the village. The altercation ensued. In meanwhile a Tata Sumo carrying the people of Patam village followed but it was also stopped for no reason. Soon

there arrived Gajendran, a police inspector and as he came out of his jeep he fired at the crowd with his service revolver felling two boys instantly, one who came in the Tata Sumo and other who had followed on his bike. It is sheer luck that the latter survived as the bullet had passed through almost touching his spine piercing through his lungs and then through his right arm. In order to justify the police action, the eye witnesses told us that the police had broken the windowpanes of some of the vehicles standing there and slapped ridiculous cases on two boys of molesting a lady constable, incidentally belonging to a Dalit caste.

The police version that the mob turned violent falls flat in the face of facts. As a face saving device, the government announced a judicial investigation by a retired single judge Mr Sampath, who however was greeted by black flags by the people. It however served the purpose to evade questions for the administration. While the collector, Ramnad reeled off the police version, the collector, Madurai admitted that he was not even informed of the firing incident by the police and assured to look into it. The brutality with which the police acted showed that the entire episode was preplanned to curb the Dalit assertion under the guise of the guru pooja. The statement of the chief minister that it was a clash between two communities is ominous and smacks of the state plan to polarize people. It is to the credit and wisdom of the people that they have not succumbed to this intrigue.

We summarize our observations as follows:

- There was no justification whatsoever for the police action both at Paramakudi as well as Madurai. Both the actions were illegal, and display of police highhandedness.
- Whatever agitation that the administration and media speaks of was the consequence and not the cause of the police action.

- It is an open fact that the Thevar community wanted to stop the Dalits' guru pooja assuming the same stature as theirs and apparently the incident supported their plan.
- The administration had mobilized huge police force with an excuse of a murder of a student that took place in Palla-Pachery village (about 30 kms from Paramakudi) on 9 th September. In the context of the history of such murders every year, this was also not an uncommon occurrence.
- The police blatantly violated their own Manual not following the procedures for opening fire. There was not only no warning before the fire, they fired to kill.
- The brutal manner in which the police behaved in the evening of 11 th September will shame humanity anywhere. They had simply beaten people to death.
- To cap it all, the Police have raided many villages unnecessarily and arrested over 500 people, who are still languishing in jails.

## **Demands**

- The state police has completely lost moral right to investigate into this case and hence the case be handed over to the CBI for investigation.
- The police responsible for the criminal act of killing and beating innocent people should be charged under the Atrocity Act as well as for the murder under IPC. Some names that prominently figure are: M/s Senthilvelan (DCP), Sandip Mittal (IG), Elangovan (DSP), Siva kumar (PI), Gajendran (PI), Shanmuganathan (SI)
- Pending investigation, the above and other officials involved in the process of granting permission for fire (such as Siva Kumar, Tehsildar, Paramakudi ) should be summarily suspended.



- All the arrested people should be released forthwith.
- All the false cases foisted on people in this episode should be dropped.
- The relief of Rs 1 lakh announced by the government to the deceased is ridiculous. Since the state has killed or maimed people for no reason, the state should compensate the families for the loss of potential earning of the dead. It should buy them annuities worth minimum Rs 5000 per month for 40 years.
- All injured people should be given Rs 1 lakh as compensation besides the reimbursement of their medical expenses.
- The coming state sponsored Thevar jayanthi is surely to repeat police atrocities on Dalits. The government should ensure that Dalits are not harassed.
- The government support to certain community's 'guru pooja' is at the root of this and other such problems. It is unbecoming of a secular state to do so. We condemn the state behavior and demand it withdraws from such indulgence.

## Dalit Capitalism And Pseudo Dalitism

07 March, 2011

In the Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels had stated “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.” In capitalism this history comes alive in its pristine form through the contention of two antagonistic classes, bourgeois and proletarians. They prophesied that proletarians would emancipate themselves by intensifying class struggle so as to bring about revolutionary transformation into socialism. Alas, it did not occur to them that proletarians could themselves become bourgeoisie and subvert the history. Why slave had to wage uninterrupted fight against freemen, plebeian against patrician, serf against lord, oppressed against oppressor; they could have themselves become freeman, patrician, lord and oppressor and solved their problem. Indeed, why even struggle against Brahmanism as did Ambedkar; dalits could themselves become Brahmins and end the problem of castesim. The proposition may sound preposterous but then that is what is precisely suggested by a section of Dalits who have been propagating Dalit capitalism.

### Deflecting Dalit Agenda

If one looks at the profile of Dalits as the predominantly (81 percent) rural people, linked with land as landless labourers and marginal farmers with a small (19 percent) section living in urban areas, a large part of which lives in slums and works in informal sectors, one surely finds that the historical Dalit discourse revolving around reservation has always been unrelated with the majority of people, because it was articulated by upwardly mobile urbanite Dalits, who detested stereotypical Dalit description and aspired to see themselves as ‘arrived’. It is this section which has been having five star conferences and international conclaves and had even planned a Dalit Capitalism March in 2006 of 5000 Dalits in three piece suit and an umbrella in hand on the roads of Delhi to demonstrate their progress. It is a

different matter; they could not do the latter. Since, globalization was opposed in the name of downtrodden; they tended to support it to stress their difference from the common stock. The concerted propaganda from them in favour of globalization and capitalism in various newspapers and even scholarly journal such as this one should be seen in this light.

It claimed how Dalits have prospered by migrating out of villages during the period of globalization. It is forgotten that Dalits, with little stake in village, have always been migrating out. As for the claim that they are better off today than before globalization (contrary to the tons of macro evidence), it suffers methodological fallacy basing itself on some superficial observations. Secondly and more importantly, the state of Dalits, better or worse needs to be established in relation to that of non-Dalit population. The celebration of Dalit capitalists and their Chamber of Commerce on the basis of some hundred odd individuals (out of more than 17 crores) in businesses, the cumulative value of which may not even be a droplet in the corporate ocean will certainly elate the neoliberal propagandist but in itself it is not a great development. There have been such 'capitalists' and such 'chambers' many times before. Although, any achievement by Dalits may be laudable, when it is projected over the entire community overlooking its woes, it becomes seriously problematic.

### **Ambedkar on Capitalism**

In the Dalit universe, Ambedkar constitutes supreme ideological authority and hence he is invariably invoked by people in support of their viewpoint, particularly when it is unfamiliar. The protagonists of globalization had tried to show him as free-marketist neoliberal and even gone to the extent of painting him as monetarist (monetarists are supposed to be the initiators of neoliberalism) to get him in support of their propaganda. In any case how many Dalits, even among the educated ones, knew what monetarism was? Ambedkar who publicly professed his opposition to capitalism

throughout his life was thus willfully distorted to be the supporter of ultra capitalism, which globalization is! Way back in 1938 Ambedkar, while addressing the railway workers in Manmad, had famously declared that the Untouchables had two enemies: Brahmanism and Capitalism. His first political party, the Independent Labour Party (ILP), was fashioned on the lines of British labour party, which followed the Fabian line of peaceful transition to socialism but abhorred capitalism. Ambedkar's ILP was not only the first but true leftist party of India, the communist party then being the socialist block of the Congress, which had borrowed the moulds of class analysis that left caste, the pervasive reality of Indian life, out. ILP, on the other hand, demonstrated on road how to embed caste and class in people's struggle.

Although, he had to dissolve ILP and form the Scheduled Caste Federation (SCF) in response to the Cripps Mission Report in 1942, his leftism and anti-capitalism remained unaffected. The States and Minorities, a memorandum submitted to the Constituent Assembly in 1947 on behalf of the SCF had proposed a radical model of state socialism, to guard against unbridled grid of capitalists. As a abiding lover of democracy, he termed capitalism "a dictatorship of private employer." (17/1/381). Elsewhere he rationalized his choice saying that "capitalism appeals to the rich and does not appeal to the poor. On the contrary socialism appeals to the poor but does not appeal to the rich." (5/444). In fact, even at the very fag end of his life, while explaining why he embraced Buddhism, his love for socialism (and hence hate for capitalism) comes out starkly. In his "Buddha or Karl Marx" he comes closer to accept Marx but for his methods, which according to him were overcome in Buddhism.

### **Caste of Capital**

Capitalism emerged as a distinct mode of production from the ruins of feudalism, which was the system of preordained privileges. It came to India under colonial cover and did not have to contend with the feudal forces for its growth. It rather made skillful use of some of its

components and let live others. For example the caste identities came handy to keep the working class divided. Still its advent and spread did impact the complexion of the castes which have internalized its accumulation logic. In that sense the general lament over Marx's prophesy at the time of the introduction of railway network that it would entail collapse of castes is misplaced. The ritual aspects of castes did collapse among the dwija castes which adopted capitalism. These castes used their caste networks to mobilize investments, mop up credit, collect and conserve information and secure political patronage, which impelled some to characterize capital by their caste, such as Marwari, Gujarati, Kutchhi capital and so on.

The same phenomenon is noted in its pronounced form in relation to the successful entrepreneurship of the middle castes. During the early post-independence decades, these farming castes were hugely enriched by the Nehruvian modernist policies of land reforms, which were immediately followed by the green revolution. The surplus coming from capitalist agriculture found ways into capitalist enterprises, which prospered primarily using the caste resources. Tirupur, a world leader in the knitted garment industry, set up by the Gounders, a typical middle farming caste in Tamilnadu, is by now famous exemplifying caste as social capital. Gounders made use of their community and family network for mobilizing capital, credit, information and as a mechanism for enforcing contract far more cheaply than competitors. The same is true of the Nadar community in Virudhunagar area entrenched in the matches and printing industries as also of the Marwaris, Sindhis, Katchis, Patels, etc, who have global networks of their castes aiding their businesses.

While it is true that caste acts as social capital, in societies sans caste, other community ties have performed the same role. The real question is while capital is created using caste networks, can that be characterized as caste capital. Going by the logic of capitalism, the answer has to be in negative. The caste can obfuscate contradictions between capitalist and workers belonging to the same caste but cannot eliminate them, nor can they foil trans-caste formation of

class of capitalists. As a matter of fact, capital does not have race, religion, caste, creed or even country. Capital has intrinsic tendency towards globalization. Today, it comes out in its true character as global capital.

### **Dalits as Capitalists**

The Nehruvian modernist project spread capitalist relations in the countryside, and hugely empowered a section of middle castes economically and politically. As a fall out, the jajmani relations, which characterized village life for most parts of the country, were uprooted rendering Dalits hopelessly dependent upon middle caste farmers for their survival as wage labourers. As the villages were vacated by the upper caste landlords, the baton of Brahmanism also came into the hands of the middle castes, which in caste terms joined the dwija caste block, reducing the caste system to its classical divide: caste and non-caste or non-Dalits and Dalits. The contradiction between Dalits and these castes, mostly stemming from capitalist paradigm, however manifested into caste atrocities. Since mid-1980s, with elitist neoliberal policy thrust, they were further adversely impacted vis-à-vis others. The odds have thus multiplied against the vast majority (more than 90 percent) of Dalits, the caste being neatly intermingled with the modern secular institutions. In the face of this pathetic dalit reality, citing stray examples of Dalit petty capitalists as the marker of progress is nothing short of a cruel joke.

One fails to understand the real motive behind such projections. If it is to highlight the riches of Dalit individuals, such cases of individual richness existed even before. Somewhat inexplicable, but there have been Dalit individuals who were extremely rich even in colonial times. That did little difference to their status as Dalits, least to their community. If it is to underline the capability or merit of Dalits, it is a hackneyed statement. During the colonial times (and even before), Dalits have displayed ample entrepreneurial prowess by accepting new vocations, setting up petty businesses, or modernizing their caste vocations and made huge progress. In fact, the Dalit movement was

actually the byproduct of this process. If it is to praise the government for its policies of globalization, which appears to be the case in view of this section belaboring to show how Dalits made progress during globalization period, it would be condemnable as not only dishonesty but also as betrayal of Dalit interests. There have been a plenty of Dalit intellectuals seeking favours of ruling classes by singing praises of their policies. Let Dalit individuals become big bureaucrats, big bourgeoisie or any big gun, he or she cannot count much in the emancipation project of Dalit community, which lies only in thoroughgoing social transformation.

# Fasts, Hunger And Hunger Strikes

05 July, 2011

“Once a government is committed to the principle of silencing the voice of opposition, it has only one way to go, and that is down the path of increasingly repressive measures, until it becomes a source of terror to all its citizens and creates a country where everyone lives in fear.”

Even Harry S. Truman, the 33rd President of the U.S., the author of the infamous Truman Doctrine to contain Communism had this advice to the governments!

## Fast and Hunger

It is amusing that the country having a dubious distinction of being a home to world's most hungry people should be shaken by the threat of hunger by a few. But that is what has been happening since Mahatma Gandhi forged them into a weapon. Interestingly, he referred to it as fast, not hunger strike, which it actually was. Fast has a religious undertone, as Ed Cole, the founder of the Christian Men's Network in the U.S, candidly stated: “A fast is not a hunger strike. Fasting submits to God's commands. A hunger strike makes God submit to our demands.” It has class connotation too. For elites it is fast, for the commoners, it is hunger strike. After all how could elites go on strike? They need to be differentiated from the working classes whose business it is to strike. One is not sure but one commonly confronts this differentiation in practice. Bhagat Singh and his comrades had gone on hunger strike in Lahore jail in which Jatin Das became a martyr on 82nd day, marking the limits of human endurance and resolve in the longest hunger strike in the world history. On the other hand, fasts, ‘indefinite’ or ‘unto death’ were undertaken by Gandhi and Gandhians many times. The very label of fast, as it appeared, assured that it would not be stretched to death



and would be concluded before long. But if it is a strike, one could not be a sure.

Mere use of labels would not however work. The system identifies what you are by the issue you espouse. Take for instance the case of Irom Sharmila from Manipur, who has entered the incredible eleventh year of her fast unto death. A poor soul, she thought, she was following Gandhian method and declared her protest as fast unto death whereas what she actually did was a hunger strike. Because, the issue she raised was the repeal of the Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA), which has virtually reduced the entire North East into a military state for the last five decades. It was too radical a demand for a fast; it had to be a hunger strike. The state understood and responded commensurately. While it has taken care in maintaining its Gandhian façade by not letting her die (the state has been force feeding her), it has never heeded her demand. Sharmila shames India for its pretensions to be a democratic republic. And she is not alone; there has been a long saga of struggles of Manipuri people, notably women of her ilk. In 2004 in the wake of rape and murder of Thanglam Manorama, these brave women had publicly unclothed themselves before the army headquarters with placard “Indian army, rape us”! Even such a shaming protest failed to move the government to stop AFSPA atrocities on hapless people.

### **Anna, Medha, Ramdev**

During the past couple of months there have been four protest fasts led by three notable persons- Anna Hazare, Medha Patkar, Baba Ramdev and the repeat by Anna Hazare in condemnation of the government’s highhanded demolition of Ramdev show at Ram Leela maidan in Delhi. Of these Medha Patkar’s fast has been the least known despite being in the media savvy Mumbai. Medha Patkar, a veteran social activist who has been the face of non-violent peoples’ struggles for over the last two decades would certainly stand taller than Anna Hazare, despite media’s euphoric projection of him as our second Mahatma and certainly an upstart Baba Ramdev, whose

antecedents are getting murkier with every passing day. Hazare's first fast of 97 hours and second one from 10 am to 6 pm at Rajghat was painted by the media as the national movement. Ramdev had still more impressive start, the UPA's senior ministers, Pranab Mukerjee and Kapil Sibal, having gone to the airport to receive him and almost yielding to his demands within hours from the start of the fast. However, the moment the Congress sensed the Saffron game plan behind Ramdev, it decided to demolish the drama in most unbecoming and shameful manner.

Medha's fast was in process of the continuing movement against eviction of slum dwellers in the name of redevelopment. Mammoth slums are being demolished without slum dwellers' consent under the controversial clause 3K of the Maharashtra Slum Areas Act. Taking up this issue being agitated against by the residents of Golibar slum, the second biggest in Mumbai, against the Shivalik ventures, she began her fast demanding immediate cancellation of the Golibar project and all other projects sanctioned under the Clause 3K along with the clause itself. This is the concrete issue that directly hit more than half the population of Mumbai metropolis that live in slums and arguably one of the major sources of corruption. As against this, Anna's band has abstracted the entire issue of corruption reducing it to the lack of constitutional institution of a Lokpal. It has effectively diverted the public outrage over successive corruption cases to the parleys for drafting the Lokpal bill. Ramdev's has been clearly a populist show, full of rhetorical noises, echoing saffron hyperbole, but carefully avoiding to point at the policy framework, shared by all the political class that gives rise to black money.

### **Magic of the Media**

It is interesting to see how media differentiated them. While the media went gaga over the fast of Anna Hazare and Baba Ramdev, it had almost ignored Medha's although the issue it had raised related to life and death of the slum dwellers in Mumbai in contrast to the surreality of corruption or abstraction of black money, the formers

blew up. All of them were Gandhian in their approach but they differed in their appeal. Medha's fast being in support of poor slum dwellers was against the development vision of the growing middle class, which constituted target readership or viewership of the media, and hence had to be ignored. On the other hand, the campaign against corruption and black money has basically risen from these classes who are eager to see India as superpower but see it being thwarted by the politicians. The abhorrence of the latter is really a reflection of their loathing for the majority of people of the lower classes, who are seen to shape the politics. Naturally, media was all out to promote it to maximize their gain.

Media is ultimately a business and cannot ignore its business interest. But the timeframes with which various businesses envisioned their missions being long in earlier times, they appeared different. The globalization paradigm has compressed not only geographical space but also time and hence every business appears nakedly driven by short term profit. Media was always manned by middle class people but they had to transcend their class boundaries to be credible in their long term business interests. Today, they are conditioned by their own class vision as their customers, having disposal incomes are also of their own class. In process, media actually recreates the middle class world for you, which has little relation with the reality. With advanced technologies, media has become so powerful that it makes and unmakes the world for you, thereby shaping and conditioning politics too. It is therefore that peoples' movements are marginalized; Maoists and Muslims are black-painted; and Dalits are stereotyped. The implication of this change in media to peoples' politics has been ominous. For instance, civil rights movement, which is predicated on media to project instances of civil rights violations to the world and thereby create pressure on the state finds itself in vulnerable situation with increasing ignorance from mainstream media.

### **Might of the State**

The above episodes of Gandhian fast also differ in the state responses they received. Medha Patkar's fast had just reiterated the continuing demand of the movement 'ghar bachao aandolan', which was consistently ignored by the government. When she went on fast along with some activists from the slum, there was no response from the state, despite their having documentary proof that Shivalik Venture had forged signatures of people and indulged in many other frauds, the crime for which its functionaries should have been summarily arrested. On the eighth day, when her health showed sign of deterioration, the government yielded and constituted committees to review its decisions. In Anna Hazare's case, the government's response was much faster, in salvaging situation by constituting the drafting committee for the Lokpal bill. In Baba Ramdev's case the government was embarrassingly receptive to start with and had reached some secret understanding with him. It only had a fascist somersault when it sensed uncongenial political angle in it and unleashed its police to tear gas people and forcibly drive them out of the Ramlila ground at the dead of night. It rightly invoked condemnation from every corner.

Notwithstanding the character of these episodes, there cannot be a doubt that they were peoples' peaceful protests well within the constitutional framework. The argument dismissing these protests as disruptive of the parliamentary system is spurious because it would amount to giving blanket license to the so called parliamentarians to loot the country. The state should have ways and means to deal with any kind of protests in democratic manner. If it violates its boundaries and clamps down on peoples' protest, it actually provokes people to try out their might in anyway they like. People, unless driven to desperation by the arrogant state, cannot challenge the might of the modern state. The fact that many peoples' movements had to take up arms to express themselves should impel the state to introspect its behavior. The manner in which the media deals with peoples' protests and the way the state patterns its responses, as

exposed by these episodes surely puts the question mark on peoples' democratic movements.

# Killing Pallars To Propitiate Thevars

*-A fact Finding Report on Police Firing at Paramakudi*

30 October, 2011

*“An oppressed people are authorized whenever they can to rise and break their fetters.”*

- Henry Clay

## Introduction

The news of police firing on Dalits, congregated at Paramakudi to observe the 54 th anniversary of the martyrdom of their leader Emmanuel Sekaran, killing six of them and injuring scores of them, just within four months from Ms J Jayalalitha regaining her power in the state for the third time, shocked the entire nation. The atrocities on Dalits in this part of Tamil Nadu is not a novel occurrence; just a few months before a decorated lady panchayat president – Krishnaveni, belonging to Arunthathiyar caste, one of the three major Dalit castes in the state, was fatally attacked. In a neighboring Tirunelveli district, a few years ago, the panchayat presidents of Nakkalamuthanpatti, P Jaggaiyan and Maruthankinaru Servaaran, who belonged to the same Arunthathiyar community, were murdered by members of the dominant castes. In a similar manner, 15 years ago, a dalit panchayat president, Murugesan, and his six relatives were cruelly done to death near Madurai . Indeed there is a history of atrocities on Dalits in southern Tamil Nadu. But unlike these incidents, which represented the civil society strife culminating into an atrocity, this one was committed by the state for apparently no reason. Again the partisan role of the state is not a new thing in India in the conflicts between Dalits and non-Dalits, it has always sided by the perpetrators of crimes overtly or covertly, but the state committing a deliberate crime of doing Dalits to death in execution of a political plan of a ruling party in a blatant manner, is surely a rare occurrence, which deserved to be exposed to the wider public.

Tamil Nadu based Centre for Protection of Civil Liberties (CPCL) took an initiative to constitute an all India team to do the fact finding into the incident. Accordingly a team comprising Priyadarshini of Democratic Students Union (DSU), New Delhi; Lakshmi Prasanna of Caste Annihilation Liberation Front; Advocates Murugan and Kesavan and S. Gopal of CPCL, and Dr Anand Teltumbde of Committee for Protection of Democratic Rights (CPDR), Mumbai visited Paramakudi, Manjoor, Keelakodumbaloor, Sadayaneeri, and Veerambal; Patam, Puliyur, Chintamani Junction; Apollo hospital in Madurai; met with eye witnesses, victims' families, injured persons and talked to state authorities—district collectors of Ramnad and Madurai districts; RDO, Meera Parameshwari and Tehsildar, Paramakudi over the two days, i.e., 2 nd and 3 rd October 2011. Taking stock of all the facts, the committee has come to a conclusion that the police action was not only unprovoked but was rather preplanned to serve the larger political interests of the ruling party.

## **Background**

Paramakudi is a taluka town in the Ramanathapuram district in South Tamil Nadu, about 70 km from Madurai on the Madurai-Rameswaram high way has been a sensitive place in the 'thevar belt' from the viewpoint of inter-caste violence between the Thevars and the Pallars for many years. Paramakudi has witnessed police firings earlier: in 1991, three persons including two Dalits were killed, and in 1998, a Dalit girl died. The major backdrop for the subject incident is the congregation of the Dalits for their *guru pooja* , a veneration of their leader- Immanuel Sekaran on the anniversary of his martyrdom in 1957. It takes place in competition to the guru pooja organized by the dominant caste Thevars in commemoration of their caste leader Muthuramalinga Thevar, who was accused of murdering Immanuel Sekaran. This phenomenon of guru poojas may appear as innocuous commemorative events of respective communities notwithstanding their observance in competition with each other, but they are no more so because of the active participation of the political parties and the partisan involvement of

the state since some years. Unless one understands the context of these rival guru poojas, the incident at Paramakudi may not be fully understood.

### **Thevar Guru Puja**

Thevar guru puja or thevar jayanti is the observance of the birth and death anniversary (both, his birth and death anniversary falling on the same date, 30 October) of Muthuramalingam Thevar, an important Thevar leader at Pasumpon Village in Kamudi Taluk in Ramanathapuram District located at about 45 km away from the district city. From 1971, the memorial as well as the event at Paumpon was undertaken by the state.

U. Muthuramalingam Thevar (October 30, 1908 – October 30, 1963), also known as Pasumpon Muthuramalingam Thevar, hailed from a wealthy landlord family belonging to the Maravar community, the dominant caste group in southern Tamil Nadu. In 1920 the government of the Madras enacted Criminal Tribes Act (CTA) including Marvar as one of the “criminal tribes”. He mobilized resistance to the CTA. Since the ruling Justice Party had refused to revoke the law, he began to work for the Congress. In 1937 provincial elections, Thevar contested the assembly election from the Ramathapuram constituency and defeated a powerful opponent, the Raja of Ramnad. He had high hopes that after forming the government in the Madras Presidency, the Congress would repeal the CTA but the new chief minister, C. Rajagopalachari, did not oblige. Disillusioned by the Congress leadership, he joined the Forward Block, launched by Subhas Chandra Bose following the Tripuri session of the Congress, where he (Bose) was humiliated by the Gandhi camp. In 1946 elections to the Assembly he was elected unopposed. Soon thereafter, the CTA was repealed. When the Congress expelled all the dissenting fractions, including the Forward Bloc in 1948, the Forward Bloc became an independent opposition party, and he became its president of its Tamil Nadu state unit. In January 1952, the first general elections in independent India, he was



elected for both Lok Sabha as well as Legislative Assembly. He decided to vacate his Lok Sabha seat and concentrate his efforts to the Madras legislative Assembly. In a central committee meeting at Nagpur in 1955, he was elected as deputy chairman of the Forward Block.

After the general elections in 1957, Thevar made peace with his former enemy C. Rajagopalachari, who had formed a new party called Congress Reform Committee, to defeat Kamaraj and the Congress rule in the state. In this election also he repeated his previous feat winning both the Lok Sabha as well as Assembly seats. This time however he resigned from his Assembly seat. In the ensuing election for the assembly seat, T.L. Sasivarna Thevar of the Forward Bloc defeated the Congress candidate. Clashes between Maravars, who largely supported the Forward Bloc, and pro-Congress Pallars began in a few villages and soon engulfed the entire district, resulting into several persons being killed and thousands of houses being torched. After the riots, a 'Peace Conference' was held which ended in acrimony between him and Emmanuel Sekaran, an important Dalit leader. Sekaran was killed the following day. Thevar was arrested for having masterminded the murder of Emmanuel Sekaran but was acquitted of all charges and released in January 1959. In the next elections in 1962, he was again reelected for the Lok Sabha but soon thereafter he died on October 30.

After his death, the Forward Bloc became ridden by splits and disputes. Consequently, the chunks of the Maravar vote-bank were overtaken by the AIDMK and DMK. Several official honours were showered upon Thevar. In 1968 the Pasumpon Muthuramalinga Thevar College was founded in Usilampatti by the then DMK-led state government. His biography was included in the high school textbooks in Tamil Nadu. In 1971 his cemetery in Pasumpon was converted into an official memorial by the AIDMK government. A life-size portrait of Thevar was installed in the Tamil Nadu assembly in 1980. In 1984, after the bifurcation of the Ramnad District the 'Pasumpon Muthuramalingam District' was created. Greenways

Road and Chamiers Road , two important arterial roads in Chennai, were renamed after Thevar, and his statue was installed at the intersection of his eponymous road with Anna Salai. Also, in Mumbai city the old Sion-Mahim link road was renamed after him.

Thevar assumed great importance in the political life in southern Tamil Nadu as an icon of the Thevar/Marvar community. Most political parties eyeing support from that community at the time of elections visit his memorial to pay respect to him. However, his legacy is not entirely uncontroversial; for Dalits, he continues to be the murderer of Immanuel sekaran. At times violence between Thevars and Dalits flares up, and desecrations of his monuments takes place.

### **Pallar Guru Puja**

Right from 1957, when Immanuel Sekaran was murdered by Thevars for not having stood up in respect for Muthuramlinga Thevar during the Peace Conference after the riots between the Thevars and Pallars in 1957 elections, the Pallars started observing anniversary of his martyrdom as guru puja. Large numbers of people congregate at Paramakudi, where a platform is erected over his burial site as the memorial.

Immanuel Sekaran was born on October 9, 1924 in Sellur village in Mudukulathur, Ramanathapuram district to Vedhanayagam, a school teacher and founder of Devendra Kula Vellalar Sangam. He participated in the Quit India movement at the age of 18 and was imprisoned for three months by the then British government. In 1945, he joined the Indian Army as Havildar Major. After serving the Army for a few years, he returned to Paramakudi to become a Youth Congress leader. He worked towards uplifting the Dalits and organized ‘ *Annihilation of Caste Conference* ’ in Madurai , which was presided over by Dr Ambedkar . He also coordinated many village-level meetings and fought against caste-based discrimination. He propagated the importance of education among Dalits and

inspired them to fight against oppression. He had a close relationship with Congress leader P. Kakkan and Perumal Peter, a Dalit leader who was heading Poovaisya Indira Kula Vellalar Association. Following the rise of Immanuel Sekaran, a significant social change, in the form of opposition to caste oppression by the Dalits did occur, especially in southern districts. This uprising, resulted in raising the consciousness of the Dalits, who utilized the available opportunities for education and jobs to make fast progress.

Following Sekaran's death, widespread riots broke out across the region (in and around Mudukkalthur in Ramanathapuram district in the south east of Tamil Nadu), and tragically both Thevars and Dalits were killed in large numbers. Dalit homes were destroyed, their crops set on fire, their families humiliated, entire villages burnt down, a church where Dalits had taken refuge was stormed by Thevar mobs and two men were killed. Several Thevars were killed too, as Dalits retaliated, and many more died in police firing. These events laid the basis for a volatile political atmosphere, which continues to persist in the region, and one in which the Thevars have lost no chance to let the Dalits know their place; Dalits for their part have continued to resist, often amidst tremendous odds. The then chief minister Kamaraj had arrested Muthuramalingam Thevar. Interestingly, Periyar had demanded this arrest. However, DMK opposed it and came to power with the support of Swatantra party led by Rajaji.

Thol. Thirumavalavan, the leader of Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi provided a succinct account of Immanuel's struggles and the circumstances leading to his assassination :

“After returning to Paramakudi, Immanuel Sekaran founded the Gospel Lutheran Christian Union on 26 September 1954 and served as its General Secretary. He functioned very bravely and questioned every casteist injustice heaped on the Pallars in the Ramanathapuram district. His increasing popularity and the militancy inculcated in the Dalits due to his efforts frightened the oppressor caste Maravars (Mukkulathors). Kamaraj, who heard of this resistance, asked

Immanuel Sekaran to join the Congress Party so that he could be given protection as per the law. In 1957, Forward Bloc leader Muthuramalinga Thevar won from the Arupukottai parliamentary constituency and the Mudukalathoor assembly constituency. Because he resigned from the Mudukalathoor assembly constituency, a bye-boll was held on 1 July 1957 . Immanuel Sekaran, now of the Congress Party, wanted to contest the election, but, Kamaraj preferred to nominate a Maravar. Immanuel Sekaran campaigned for the Congress. Sasivarna Thevar, a candidate of the Forward Bloc won the election. However, the Dalits and the Nadars had voted for entirely for the Congress. Angered by this, the Maravars started unleashing greater oppression against the Dalits and the Nadars. In order to offer sacrifices to the Badrakali temple, the Maravars kidnapped 9 Dalit men from the village of Katamangalam and took them along. The crops belonging to the Dalit people were destroyed. Caste riots and rampages took place, and 42 Dalits were slain in the Mudukalathoor riots. Due to the escalating oppression, the then District Collector C.V.R.Panikkar made arrangements for talks between the Dalits, Maravars and Nadars on 10 September 1957 . Perumal Peter and Immanuel Sekaran represented the Dalits. Muthuramalinga Thevar suggested that all the leaders could address the people in a public meeting. The Dalit representatives feared that Muthuramalinga Thevar could use the meeting to create further tension, suggested that all the leaders sign an agreement, which could be distributed among the people. When Muthuramalinga Thevar had entered this meeting, everybody including the Collector stood up with the exception of Immanuel Sekaran. The Collector asked Immanuel why he did not stand up when a leader entered. Immanuel replied, 'He is not a leader to me. He wanted to destroy my whole community.' This angered Muthuramalinga Thevar very much. As a consequence, the talks came to an abrupt end without any solution in sight. Muthuramalinga Thevar who felt slighted is reported to have not even touched food when he visited a luncheon hosted in his honour immediately afterwards. He is said to have remarked that everybody was complacent when a small boy had dared to question

him. The next day, on 11 September 1957, Immanuel Sekaran who was returning to Peraiyur, after having participated in a function to commemorate the poet Subramania Bharthi, was attacked by the Maravars and murdered on the spot. Periyar passed a resolution seeking the arrest of Muthuramalinga Thevar. Kamaraj, the then Chief Minister, immediately arrested Muthuramalinga Thevar and all the Maravars who were responsible for the riots. Later, the C.N. Annadurai-led DMK government released all those arrested in connection with the 1957 riots. Today, there is a memorial for Immanuel Sekaran in Paramkodi in southern Tamil Nadu.”

### **The Incident**

The facts of the case are simple enough. Since there are a couple of good videos available of the entire episode, they could be even treated as incontrovertible. Despite this the incident was projected as “a battlefield between the agitators and the police personnel” in which “Scores of policemen were injured and a number of government vehicles including a riot control vehicle were torched down by the agitators”. The Madurai edition of the Hindu reported the incident as the front page lead item further:

“The trouble started when a group of 200 persons, mostly belonging to the Tamizhaga Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam (TMMK), staged a road roko at Five Point Junction, demanding the release of their leader John Pandian. The TMMK leader was arrested by the police in Vallanadu, Tuticorin district when he was about to proceed towards Paramakudi about 60 km away farther.”

“Initially, the police held negotiations with the agitators, asking them to give up the protest. When the negotiations were on, some miscreants threw stones and footwear at the police, following which the mob was lathicharged. The police also burst teargas shells at the protesters. Meanwhile, the Chief Minister Jayalalithaa, in a statement said that the agitators, however, continued indulging in violence. The

police had to resort to firing .. .. Only after that, did the mob disperse, ... ”

“The Chief Minister stated that the police firing was made in self-defense and to protect public property. She also pointed out that number of police personnel including a Deputy Inspector General of Police was injured as a result of violence by TMMK.”

The previous day, it had reported the murder of a 16 year Dalit student with a blaring caption “The rival group allegedly committed the crime provoked by offending remarks on a wall against the community to which they belong”:

“A Dalit youth Palanikumar (16) [son of Thangavelu of Pacheri village of Ramnathpuram, and a student of Government Higher Secondary School, Anaikulam was allegedly hacked to death by a group of 10 persons early on Saturday when he was returning after watching a play. Following his murder, tension had built up in and around Kumudhi and Mudukulathur.”

The Hindu is cited here only because it is considered by most people as authentic news reporter. If it had reported the incident uncritically based on the police version, what would most others, which thrive on sensationalizing news would have done. The media has always displayed a caste bias against Dalits in any such episode.

The incident as recorded in the video may be narrated as follows: As in previous years, since the morning of 11 September, people began gathering at Paramakudi to observe the 54 th death anniversary of Immanuel Sekaran. The people had collected at the Five-Point junction. There was a big posse of policemen in helmets and laced with the anti-riot gear. They had formed a wall along the Madurai - Rameswaram road, leaving a lane sufficient to pass vehicles. There were no vehicles however because the traffic on that road was diverted as per the practice in previous years. They had also brought an anti-riot armoured vehicle called *vajra* and stationed it at about

20 meters distance. People, oblivious of the police presence, were shouting slogans. The crowd was swelling as the time passed.

At around 11.30, suddenly, the police begin lathi charge. People run helter skelter towards Mudukulathur road. People are chased away by police further. People begin pelting stones at police from distance. Most stones do not reach police. Some police however appears to have been hit. Just after 10 to 15 minutes, the vajra is brought in and positioned opposite to Mudukulathur road. Suddenly, the firing starts and people start falling. Many people do not seem to realize that it was firing until they see people being hit and fall bleeding. They start running leaving the road littered with the footwear and the blood splatter. At this end of Madurai-Rameswaram road, some people are seen breaking the glass of a standing truck. Vajra is majestically providing shelter to the policemen firing at the mob. As the video record comes to an end, the police begin lifting bodies without much qualm for dignity of dead or wounded. There are no stretchers. They catch hold of stray people and start thrashing them. An old man, identified later as Vellaichamy, a 70-year-old retired headmaster of a primary school, who had been visiting Paramakudi for the past 20 years to pay his respects at the memorial of Sekaran, gets caught by the police. The old man is hit by every policeman as though he were a football, as he is pushed out of the road. Vellaichamy had to be hospitalized for 5 days.

On the same day around the same time there was another incident of police firing at the Chintamani junction on the outskirts of Madurai. The people of Puliur, while travelling in an open lorry were stopped by the police at the Chintamani junction outpost. Altercation between people and police ensued and police fire in which two people were injured. As per the Police version faithfully carried by the media, the people indulged *rasta roko* and arson and burning vehicles including theirs and hence they had to resort to firing to save the public property.

At the end, four people die of gunshot injury and two of severe beating. No newspaper reports the latter. Slowly, certain falsehood in the police version trickles through the media. The Hindu of 15.09.11 reported John Pandian, President of Tamizhaga Makkal Munnetra Kazhagam (TMMK) saying, “I was allotted time between 3 pm to 5 pm to pay my respects at the memorial ... but was later illegally detained saying Section 144 Cr PC has been promulgated prohibiting me from entering Ramnathpuram.” He demands FIR to be filed against Rajesh Das, IG Police, South Zone, and K A Senthilvelan, Deputy Commissioner, Adyar (who was on deputation) under section 302 and Avaniapuram (Madurai) Inspector Gajendran under section 307 of the IPC. The chief minister makes the prompt statement defending the police on the very first day and declares Rs 1 lakh as solatium to the family of the dead. She rejects the demand for the CBI investigation and rather proposes RDO investigation, not realizing that a junior official like an RDO could not possibly go into the actions of the SP and Collector. Eventually she institutes an enquiry by a retired single judge, J Sampath. People express their anger and no confidence, showing black flags to J Sampath when he visits a village.

The incident is tenuously based on whether people really go out of control warranting firstly lathi charge by the police. Was there a sufficient ground thereafter for opening fire on people, which dropped four of them dead and injured scores of others? Police claim that they had burst tear gas shell, which the video recording does not indicate. None of the witnesses also told us that there was any warning from the police before actual firing. At Chintamani junction at Madurai, similarly, there did not seem to be any justification for the police to open fire. What could a lorry full people really do? The task before the team therefore was to find out from the cross section of witnesses whether the police action killing six people and wounding several was justified. It is obvious that the police had not followed their own manual.

## Findings



***Day 1: 02 October 2011***

***Location: Paramakudi, Five-Point junction***

At the spot of firing, we generally spoke with the crowd collected around us about what they saw around 11.30 onwards at the Five-Point junction on 11 September. Some eye witnesses came forward telling what they saw.

**Witness 1: Ravichandran**

At about 11.30 he was there. There may not have been more than 200 people. The police perhaps were in larger number. He did not know what happened. Suddenly, he saw people running on Mudukulathur road and police after them with their lathis. I had at that point slipped off from the place.

**Witness 2: Somasundaram**

He said he was standing on the road at 11.30. There were little over 100 people in the crowd but people were adding fast. There is a bypass to Paramakudi from Madurai on which the traffic is diverted every year. No public transport is allowed on the road and hence there was no question of any road roko.

**Witness 3: Shaktivelu**

At 11.30, there may not have been more than 200 people. The stone throwing had started after the police began lathi charge. After reaching the safe distance from the police, people started pelting stones at them. When the firing started, I also could not comprehend it but when I saw a person fall some 100 meters away on the Mudukulathur road, I got scared and fled away.

**Witness 4: Murugaya, Belonged to the SC/ST government employees' association**

I go every year to pay my homage to Immanuel Sekaran. From 2007, we have been demanding that the Sekaran guru puja should be declared as the state function. Since two dalit MLAs have been elected from the area, this demand caught particular force. At 11 am people learnt about John Pandian's arrest. They began his immediate release around 11.30 am. The lathi charge of the police was unprovoked. As far as I saw it clearly, people had not indulged in any physical action. The police particularly, Shiv Kumar, Inspector, Paramakudi and Senthivelan, Dy Commissioner should be held for all the loss of life and atrocities.

**Witness 5: Selvam (small business in Parahmakudi)**

Sivakumar, inspector Paramakudi and Senthivelan, DG are the prime accused who targeted the people. He is also notorious for his anti-Dalit stand and also has many cases pending against him. There is a strong demand from the people of Paramakudi, especially from 2007 for declaring Emmanuel Sekaran's death anniversary as a state function. This time there are two Dalit MLAs from Paramakudi, hence the expectation of its materializing has become stronger. People in Paramakudi do not have any doubt in mind that the police firing was preplanned. All the stories the police fed to the media and official channels are false. There was absolutely no provocation. People were just shouting slogans in revelry and nothing untoward had happened to provoke the police to open the lathi charge and soon thereafter firing. The police action is to demoralize the dalits from making such a demand and to please Thevars who would not want the Sekaran guru puja to be the state sponsored event quite like theirs. They would their symbolic dominance if it happens.

The team tried to elicit information from the small stall owners at the junction where the firing had taken place. Most of them said that they had shut the shop and were either inside or were at homes. They did not see exactly what happened. They only heard the sound of firing and saw people running helter skelter and some having fallen on the Mudukulathur road.

*Place: memorial of Emanuel Sekaran*

**Witness4: Adv. Pasumalai**

Last year over 3 lakh people came for the gathering on September 11. In recent years the number of people congregating for the function has risen drastically. With the exception of CPI and CPM all political parties attend this function. Since 2007 this has been transformed from being a cultural and social event to a political event. The enemies of dalits perceive a threat of such huge dalit mobilization and make efforts to sabotage it either by committing a murder on the eve of this day or in any other manner. There have been killings and counter killings between Thevars and Pallars right from 2007. But the administration pushes it under carpet.

Visiting the families of those murdered:

*Place: Manjoor Village nearly 12 km from Paramakudi, adjacent to the Madurai-Rameswaram road.*

**Victim: Jaybal, died of gun shot**

Jayabal ( ), who died of the gunshot belonged to this village. He was the only son to his parents and worked as a lorry driver. He had married an upper caste girl. Jaabal's wife had delivered a female child two days ago. Manjoor is a settlement of dalits who are a part of the larger village having Konar and Muslim population. Most of the people had gone for works. We spoke with his grand mother, who lived with him along with her husband. They told us that they work either on farms or on the brick kilns. The wage rate for the farm labour is about Rs 50/ day and that for pother work approx Rs 100/ day. On asking about the MNREGA work, people who worked on the scheme came forward and showed us their records, which had Rs 35 to 50 as the daily wage rate. They said only this year because of elections they got Rs 90/ day. This is the village which put up black flags in protest of J Sampath enquiry commission and prevented him from entering the village.

*Place: Kodumbaloor Vilage*

**Victim: Theerpukani, died of brutal beating by police**

It is a dalit village with 350 Pallar families. Theerpukani, a 22years old youth studying in II year of polytechnic, was brutally beaten to death. He is survived by his parents, a brother and two sisters.

We spoke with his mother and sister, joined later by his father. His mother inconsolably wept narrating his story. She told that they all had gone to the memorial to pay homage to Emmanuel Sekaran and went to the 5 road crossing around 11 am. They saw people running in all directions from the five-road crossing. Theerpukani wanted to take his bike parked there but seeing no one except police there he returned home along with his friends. In the evening at around 3 pm he, accompanied by his friends and cousins, had gone back to the spot to fetch his bike. After an hour or so they started to search for him as he did not return. By 7p.m. the Village Administrative Office had called their house to inform that Theerpukani was dead and that his body was taken to Madurai. Later they found out from his friends and cousins that they were all picked up by the police and beaten badly. Theerpukani was wearing a banyan in Red and Green colour (the colours of the Flag of Devendras, i.e., Pallars), which irked the police. He was picked up and taken to the police van. He was beaten to death there itself. His postmortem report confirmed that he was beaten to death.

**Victim: Muniyandi, elder brother of Theerpukani's father**

He is Theerpukani's uncle. His hand was bandaged and had a wound on his back. He had gone to look for Theerpukani and his cousins around 4.30 pm. On his way near the Five-Point crossing he was stopped and was beaten by the police. When he fell down his mobile and watch slipped. The police had taken (stolen) his mobile. As he was injured he came back home. He got treatment from a private Doctor with his own money. He said there would be scores of people

like him who were wounded with police beating but do not figure in any records. Most people, who could manage to get away did so and treated themselves privately. His wounds were yet not healed and he was finding it difficult to bend his arm.

*Place: Sadayaneeri Village*

**Victim: Muthukumar (26), died of gunshot**

The village was exclusively Pallar. Muthukumar, who died of a gunshot, was working in a gas agency in Paramakudi. He is survived by his parents, wife son (4) and daughter(2 ½).

Since Muthukumar was working in Paramakudi, he had gone to Five-Point crossing earlier, while his family along with villagers. After paying homage at the memorial, they had started back around 11.30 pm and were stranded on the way as the firing had already started at the junction. A bullet hit him there. Pandeewari (his wife) told us that her parents, who reside near Paramakudi were first informed about Muthukumar having been shot by his friends. His friends managed to click a picture of him with phone camera, after having been hit with a bullet. They were informed that he was taken to the Paramakudi General Hospital, but he was not admitted there. While his in-laws went there, they were informed that he was taken to Madurai General Hospital. It was only the next day that they could go to Madurai. We were told that he was alive till September 12 th and died due to non-availability of treatment.

The family had 1 acre land which they cultivated and supplemented their income by working as farm labour.

*Place: Veerambal Village*

**Victim: Paneerselvam (50), died of gunshot**

Veerambal is a Pallar village with a majority being Christians. It is the native of Emmanuel Sekaran's mother. It is surrounded by 13

dominant caste villages and is considered as one of the sensitive areas from the viewpoint of caste conflict. We got down at the church where many people were already available. Father at the church gave us information on the village and conducted us to the house of Pannerselvam, who had fallen to one of the police bullets.

Pannerselvam had migrated temporarily to a place near Paramakudi, bought some land and was cultivating it. On that fateful day, he had come to Paramakudi to visit his daughter. He had called her around 11.30 pm to inform that there was a firing at the Five-Point junction and therefore he would go to her the next day. That was the last time they had spoken to him. They had tried contacting on his mobile phone the entire day but it was not answered. Around 7 pm, the phone was answered by an unknown person who did not reveal his identity but inquired about Panneselvam and his family and disconnected the phone. It was only through the television footage that the family came to know that he was killed. As per the post mortem report, Panneselvam had died due to a bullet hit on his forehead.

*Place: Paramakudi while returning to Madurai from Veerambal.*

We were met with S. Raju, who identified himself as General Secretary, Thiyagi Immanuel Peravai, Paramakudi.

He gave a brief background of the incident. He said that it was not an isolated incident of police firing but was a part of the plan that is unfolding since 2007 to sabotage the event assuming a rising scale. From 2007, the Immanuel Sekaran guru puja is really transformed into a big event, where lakhs of people began congregating to pay homage to his memory. He told us that since 2007, almost every year, some Dalit person who is active in one way or the other would be murdered by the Maravars in the first week of September. In 2007, a teacher Kutti Vathiyar was murdered by the Maravars. In

2009, Arivazhagan, from Sivagangai district was murdered in September. In 2010 Harikrishnan from Konthgai, who was a mason by profession but also used to do wall writings inviting people to join the gathering on September 11, was murdered by the Maravars. In 2011, a 16 year old boy Palanikumar from Pallapacheri village was murdered on September 9<sup>th</sup>, just two day before the guru puja day.

All these murders, he said, were aimed at frightening the people from going to Paramakudi and sabotaging the event from being successful. But these plans did not work. The people not only came but also came in larger numbers and resolutely paid their homage peacefully. Also, the Pallar people did not forget to give the Maravars in their own coin. All these murders were also duly avenged by killing the perpetrators of crime.

In September 2007, at the time of 50<sup>th</sup> guru puja, the people had put up welcome posters using ‘ *daiva thirumagan* ’ and “ *therasi talaivar* ” the epithets, normally used for Muthuramlinga Thevar, for Immanuel Sekaran. The police had objected to it and advised the dalit leaders not to use it. The leaders retorted asking for the government order and kept on using it thereafter. John pandian's party especially uses them on their hoardings.

He believed that the state did not want to make September 11 a sate function, which is the demand of the people since 2007. This year, they were determined that they would clinch it as they had two MLAs from that area. Hope was strengthened by the fact that in 2010 the central government had issued a postage stamp in honour of Immanuel sekaran.

**Day 2, Date: October 3 October 2011.**

***Place: Sivagangai, Madurai***

There was an incident of police firing in the outskirts of Madurai near the Chinthamani ring road. It is said that the people who had come from Sivagangai district were stopped at the Chinthamani

junction as they were traveling in an open truck (which is prohibited to carry people). While the people were arguing with the police, those who were coming in closed vehicles were also stopped, leading to altercation between the people and the police. It is reported that one Gajendran, Inspector police, shot at the crowd without any provocation. Two boys were seriously injured from firing and many due to beating.

***Place: Pattam Village***

**Victim: Balakrishnan, wounded by the bullet shot**

We went to see Balakrishnan, an 18 years old boy, son of Ramar, a farm labourer. His family members were away on work. Balakrishnan said that they had some own land but they have to work on others' farms to supplement their earning.

He had an entry and exit wound on his back, which shows that he was fired upon from a close range. He narrated that the Pattam villagers started off for the guru puja in a Tata Sumo and one more closed vehicles. When they reached the Chinthamani junction, the Puliur villagers were having an altercation with the police. The police stopped the Pattam villagers also. But they moved ahead saying that they were in closed vehicles and hence they wouldll just leave the place without causing any problem. But they were again stopped. Some people got out of the Sumo. The police began beating them up in which one Bose was severely injured on his head. It angered the Pattam villages who confronted the police asking why they were stopped and were being beaten. Gajendran reached there in a jeep and as he got out, he immediately started firing from his service pistol. Balakrishnan said that he had not even realized that he was hit with a bullet as he was running but then he fainted.

Raja, another witness told us that Balakrishnan was carried on a two wheeler by the people themselves and admitted in the General Hospital and was later shifted to Apollo Hospital, from which he was



discharged recently. He said that Balakrishnan is falsely charged for molestation of a woman police constable in the police report along with other usual charges of rioting, etc. Balakrishnan, although shocked at his plight, was not reconciled with it and was determined to fight a legal battle against the police.

*Victim: Jaya Prashanth, wounded with a gun shot*

Not very far from Balakrishnan's house, across the village street, was the house of Jeya Prashanth, a 19 years old boy, who had a diploma in electrical engineering. He was working in Trichy with Airtel tower company. He was grievously injured by the bullet. The bullet had entered from the right side of his back, at the place close to the spinal cord, came out from under his arms, and entered his fore arm, eventually exiting just above his right elbow. Although discharged from the hospital, he was plastered all over. The nature of the wounds itself was indicated that he was shot from a close range.

He narrated that he along with his friends reached the Chinthamani junction to catch the vehicle that was going to Paramakudi. But when they reached, people were already running as they were being beaten up by the police. As he too turned to run he was shot at by the police and fell down. As he cried for help, the police ran to him to beat him. When he told them that he was already shot at, they picked him up in a police van and took him to police station instead of a hospital. He said that even as he was bleeding profusely and fighting for life the police asked him to sign blank sheets of papers and threatened that only after he signed them, they would take him to hospital. He refused to oblige. It was only after the pressure from people gathered there built up, that he was taken to the hospital. It was by then, 1 pm but even there he was not treated until the evening. It was only with the intervention from Vaiko they started treatment on him. He also has charges of molestation against him like Balakrishnan.

*Place: Puliur, a Dalit village in Sivagangai district.*

We went to this village as it was the people from this village who were stopped by the Chintamani junction police. We stopped at a place where some people were collected. One Nagendran, B.com from American college, who was in the vehicle that day came forward to give his testimony.

He told us that from Puliur, they tried to arrange vehicles to go to Paramakudi for Emmanuel Sekaran's guru puja. But none of the travel agencies was ready to rent them vehicles. Even those who received the advance returned the money on a previous day and hence they got only an open truck. When they left in one such open truck, they were stopped by the police at Chinthamani junction. The police firstly thrashed the driver for taking them. When the others confronted the police they started to beat the people. Two to three people were injured in the head and some others also got injured elsewhere. Around that time, Gajendran, the police inspector arrived there. As he got down from his jeep, he took out his pistol and fired at people felling two boys. When asked if there was any instance of molestation, he denied saying that there were only two women constables and they were standing far away from where the lathi charge took place. He was vehement that Gajendran should be charged for attempt to murder among other things. The police people there also behaved highhanded with people in unnecessarily beating them. They all also should be booked under the SC/ST Atrocity Act.

He along with other villagers felt that it was a planned action by the police in order to prevent people from going to Paramakudi. They also said that after the incident police came to raid their village and picked up people randomly forcing men folk to flee and to sleep in the farms for more than a week.

*Place: Chinthamani junction, Ring Road.*

**Witness: Duraipandi**

Duraipandi along with his friends had arranged for welcoming people who were going to Paramakudi. They had also arranged for loud speakers. He told us that from the previous evening itself, the sub inspector Shanmuganathan had started harassing people who had gathered around the place. The next day when people were passing from there towards Paramakudi they were stopped, on the pretext of traveling in an open vehicle. As the people argued with the police and pleaded that they should be allowed to go, the police unnecessarily lathi charged them. As if that was not enough, the inspector Gajendran came there in his jeep and opened fire from his pistol. He left the spot on a two wheeler immediately after firing down two young boys. Duraipandi told us that after the incident, the police burnt their own vehicles to make a story that people indulged in burning their vehicle and hence they had to lathi charge and fire in self defence. He had heard that the Police FIR against people contains all such charges but they were all false. He had seen it with his own eyes. On asking about the molestation charges against police women, Duraipandi expressed surprise that the police could go to such a silly extent.

*Place: Apollo Hospital.*

**Victim: Singadurai, Burma colony, Paramakudi**

At the hospital, we had to take special permission from the general Manager, who agreed two of us to be conducted by his staff but not before telling us that the victims told all kinds of cock and bull stories to various people who visit them. It showed the typical upper caste upper class bias against Dalits even in the times of severe crisis.

We were taken to Sighadurai, who had multiple fractures, probably with dislocations in his right arm and also a deep head injury. He told us that he was picked up by the police around 3 pm near the Paramakudi Railway crossing which is about half a kilometer from the Five-Point junction. He was taken to the police van. They were some 12-15 boys like him who were also badly beaten with lathis for

an hour or so until they fell unconscious. They were then taken to Elayankudi General Hospital. The police left them there and went back. They were sent from there to Sivagangai General Hospital and then sent to Madurai General Hospital where they received some treatment.

*Place: Apollo Hospital, Madurai.*

**Victim: Kumar, 26 years, Kattu Paramakudi. He has a wife and a 7 months old son.**

He had a fracture in both his hands right leg and also a head injury. He told us that he was going to a shop in Five-Point junction and was picked up from there by the police and was thrashed badly. He said around 15 police men rounded him up and beat him. Later he along with 5 others was taken to Elayankudi General Hospital. He saw two of them dying on the way. The three others were sent to Sivagangai and later Madurai General Hospital in an ambulance.

**Victim: Siva, 19 years, Odachiyar Valasai village, Ramnad district.**

He had a bullet injury on his right thigh. He had received it and was taken to the hospital by the people around. He was brought to the Madurai General Hospital and was there for eight days without any treatment. He was then transferred to Apollo hospital where he was operated upon and the bullet was taken out.

*Place; Police Headquarters, Madurai*

**Police Superintendent: Asra Garg**

We went to see SP, Madurai to know from him the reasons for the police action at the Chintamani junction. We sent a request in but were asked to wait downstairs. We could not afford to wait endlessly and hence requested him through his attendant to give us a time slot for a brief interview. He did not respond and kept us waiting. Ultimately, we left with his assurance that he would give us a call

when he was free. He looked all along reluctant in talking to us and hence we did not believe that he would call us. It came true. He did not call us.

### *Telephonic Contacts*

Collector, Ramnad District: Arun Roy (phone: 9444183000)

We contacted Mr Arun Roy, Collector, Ramnad district on phone. We asked him two questions: one, what was the provocation for the police action to lathi charge and open fire a short while thereafter that led to loss of four lives and left scores of people injured. And two, what made the police go into action between 3 to 5 pm after the situation had come to normalcy after the firing, rounding up randomly 18 youth belonging to Pallar castes and beating them badly in a police van and thereafter in the police station such that two boys die and balance are seriously injured. Roy replied narrating the sequence of events and said inter alia that people were doing rasta roko. The police were negotiating with them but they were not budging. Suddenly, they started abusing and throwing stones at them in response to which the police had to begin lathi charge. On telling him that since the traffic on the main road was diverted that day as in previous years, there was no question of rasta roko. Moreover, the stray vehicles were passing through a lane maintained by the police smoothly. He said that it was not the vehicular traffic, they prevented movement of people. On asking which people, he did not have cogent answer. We asked him whether he was aware of the video recordings of the entire episode being available, which do not corroborate with his version. He said that he heard of them but had not seen them. He however insisted that he was convinced that police action was justified. In reply to the second question, he said according to his information was that all the six people died on spot. On reminding about his own report to the court indicating that some people died of non-bullet injuries, he agreed that there was a case of that kind.

When we told him that the postmortem reports clearly showed at least two people had died of beating. He pleaded ignorance.

Roy tried to justify the police action saying that many policemen were injured in the stone pelting and had to be hospitalized. When even after the lathi charge, people continued to pelt stones and began burning vehicles on the Madurai- Rameswaram road, police had to open fire. On questioning that after the police chased people away with lathi charge deep into Mudukulathur road, how could people burn vehicles on Madurai - Rameswaram road, he did not have cogent answer. We then asked him whether as a collector he had ascertained that police followed the procedure while opening fire such as issuing warning, bursting tear gas shell and only after then opening fire aiming below the waist. He said that he believed the police did however could not answer in specific. He could not tell us the number of tear gas shell the police fired before opening fire. On specific querying whether he checked the inventory records to ascertain the police version, he answered in negative. On pointing out to him that according to post mortem reports all casualties showed bullet marks well above waist, indicating that police had fired to kill, he said he did not have this information.

He then tried to divert the topic saying that Paramakudi was a sensitive place; there were other communities too and they needed to be protected. So the firing was effectively for two reasons: one, self defence and two, for the protection of other communities. He could not however explain which other communities he meant as there were none around the spot needing police protection. He further stated that normally the collector was supposed to do his own investigation into such incidents but since the government had announced a one man judicial commission, he himself became a subject of investigation. He could not call for any evidence as it would amount to tampering with evidence.

RDO, Ramnathpuram: Meera Parameswari (Phone: 9445000473)

The RDO categorically denied that she had given permission for firing and said she was 40 km away from Paramakudi.

**Tehsildar: Shiv Kumar**

He declined to speak to us without the permission from the collector.

A reporter who did not want to be identified told us that after the incident Gajendran rode his bike and spoke on his cell phone with his staff. When a photographer approached him to take a snap he suddenly realized something and stopped him. He went inside and put up saline and asked the photographer to come and take a photograph.

*Place: Madurai, Collector's Bungalow*

**Madurai collector: Mr. Sahayam, IAS**

Mr Sahayam gave us a patient hearing and said that he himself was shocked to hear about the firing at the Chintamani crossing, when he learnt about it after some time. He was not informed about the firing by the police and had got the news from other sources. He told us that he had immediately called the SP and rushed to the spot. He said that since there was an inquiry going on he would be able to provide only the police version of the story. He then narrated that the people had traveled in open vehicle which was the reason for them being stopped. It led to commotion. He said he was told that the police negotiated with the people to leave the spot. But when it failed they had to resort to lathi charge and firing. He commented that even if going by the police version, he felt that the firing could have been avoided. He said that he visited the hospital too and saw the injured. He ordered for the best treatment to them. He was visibly moved by the facts we narrated. He said it was not known to him that the people in the Apollo Hospital were randomly picked up after the firing and were beaten by police. It was too brutal for anyone to do that. He regretted that it was not his jurisdiction.

We reported to him that the SP, Madurai was not willing to talk to us.

When the issue of false cases being slapped on the victims was brought to his notice, he said that some lawyers had also told him about them. He was shocked to hear that the two boys who were fatally hit by Gajendran's bullets were 18 and 19 years old and they were charged for molesting a woman constable along with some usual ones. He assured us that he would definitely look into this matter and do all that is possible to withdraw these false cases against the victims. He also noted that the victims were already under pain and stress and such false cases by police would only amount to more harassment.

### Analysis and Observations

The Police Action was Preplanned

*It is not difficult to pin in the crime of police on 11 September 2011. The massive evidence in the form of video records, which certainly remains unused so far will demolish every excuse they have been making for resorting to lathi charge and firing. All of our findings tell us that the police acted without any provocation from people. While it is imaginable that the arrest or detention of John Pandian had created the anger in people, it had not reached the point of expression into any violent act. Taking into account all the facts, it appears to us that the entire episode was preplanned with some political objective in mind.*

*Firstly, in the context of recent history of murders on the eve of rival guru pujas, the extra security arrangement by way of preparedness of police to take care of any contingency may not be faulted but to prevent John Pandian, the TMMK president from coming to Paramakudi, in violation of the earlier permission granted to him, was certainly an unwarranted provocation to the crowds. In what followed, it smacks of the police plan to create an alibi for their*



*action on the Pallars. They claim that the people were demanding John Pandian's release and suddenly began pelting stones on them, which impelled them to start the lathi charge. The videos we studied would dismiss any such possibility. The stone pelting is possible when there is distance between two groups. The crowd at the Five-point junction prior to the lathi charge did not keep any such distance from the police. The segment of Madurai - Rameswaram road at the junction was packed. If any stone was pelted in that situation, it could only injure the people and not the police, who were wearing protective gears like helmet. The concocted story of stone pelting by people thus does not hold any water. Rather, it is the police by resorting to the lathi charge provoked people to do stone pelting. It is clearly captured in the videos. Because then the people were pushed quite inside the Mudukulathur road, creating some distance between them and the police. Likewise, the story of people resorting to breaking and burning vehicles also is false because there were no vehicles at the Five-point junction. Only after the police left their position for chasing people into the Mudukulathur road, people were angered and may have indulged into such activities. The video, for instance, has captured a couple of boys trying to break the front glass of a truck standing at some distance. It may thus be concluded that the entire story constructed by the police to justify their getting into action itself is false.*

*As the lathi charge happens, the people run away on the Mudukulathur road. After some minutes, some of them begin pelting stones towards the police who were trying to chase them away. These are the normal reactions by people to the police action they see unjustified. Firstly, it was not heavy stone pelting and secondly most stones did not even reach the police. It did not in any manner spell an uncontrollable situation. Police could simply warn people to stop it or just retreat to their old positions. They were all wearing helmets and as such did not risk being injured in normal course. People would have stopped it after some time. After all, where would they get endless supply of stone for pelting? In any case the police*

*manual prescribes the procedure to be followed before resorting to firing. It includes adequate warning to the people on the public address system, followed by the water jet or tear gas shell. Even after this the mob defiantly continues violence; the police could be justified to open fire. Fire, not to kill but to disperse the people! But in Paramakudi, nothing of this kind has happened. The police claims to have burst the tear gas shell but it is totally bogus. If they had burst the shells, the video would have captured the bursting sound as well as smoke and reactions thereto in people. None of this is indicated in the video record. None of our witnesses also told us that the police warned or burst tear gas shells before resorting to firing. After the lathi charge for 10 minutes or so, they get vajra on the main road and immediately begin firing. One can see people dropping on road clearly with bullet hits. All the bullet injuries people received are above waist and violative of the police manual. It is clear that police hastened to fire and fired to kill.*

The way the police treated the injured and the dead only reflects the deep hatred in their minds against the Dalits. Many of the injured people we met told us that they were carried to the hospitals by their friends. Many people got themselves treated privately and hence did not figure in the official count. The video recording showed the callous manner the police carried the corpses, with the head and limbs dangling against ground. Those injured whom the police carried had to wait bleeding for hours before they were taken to hospital and even then some of them told us having remained unattended. The entire conduct of the police was abominable and smacked of casteist prejudice. We were told that some key police people known for their anti-dalit attitude were brought especially to handle the plan at Paramakudi. The key persona on the police side whether it is at Paramakudi or the Chintamani junction had some history of dalit hatred and moral infirmity.

If Paramakudi was the case of mass provocation, what had really happened at the Chintamani junction in Madurai? There it was a simple issue of people travelling in an open truck. If what people told us was true (and there is no reason for us to believe it was not) that the bus owners whom they had paid advance to book the bus for going to Paramakudi, had returned it on the previous day, at the instance of police. It was a highly objectionable act on the part of police. Many people had to drop the plan of going to Paramakudi but some hired whatever vehicles that were available. When the police stopped people travelling in an open truck, the altercation was bound to happen. Although no one told us about the rasta roko at the Chintamani junction except for the newspapers, even if people had resorted to rasta roko, the police cannot just react with caning them. Such things are normal expression of peoples' dissent in democracy. The police have to have some tact of handling mobs, and patience to see its viewpoint and not just arrogantly flaunt their lathis and gun.

*Well, people from Puliur village were stopped for travelling in an open truck; what about the people of Pattam village who were travelling in a Tata sumo? Why were they stopped? Whatever that transpired to provoke the police to lathi charge the people, where was the need to fire upon them? The manner in which Gajendran reaches there, takes out his pistol and fires upon people may become a police inspector in a Tamil movie, not the real one. The two boys that he injured would well have been dead but for their luck. He perhaps realized the wrong he committed. Because thereafter his policemen themselves were found damaging the vehicles at the Chintamani junction as some loader union member told us. Ganjendran himself left on a motorbike to the hospital and got himself bandaged for nothing. The journalist, who did not want to be identified, told us that he had seen him riding his bike and wanted to take a snap as he had just heard of the firing but Gajendran had asked him not to and asked him to come to the hospital after some time. When he went there to meet him he was lying with fake bandage. We made several efforts to contact him on*

*phone but we could not get him. Ultimately, we physically went to his place, but even there we could not find him.*

We were told that the police slapped various charges of arson etc. on the victims and also made a policewoman, incidentally belonging to Pallar caste, to file an FIR that some of the boys tried molesting her. Two boys, aged 18 and 19, who were injured in the firing reportedly have been charged for molestation. The entire cover up operation the police planned is not only ridiculous but also adds to their crime.

There is absolutely no doubt that the Chintamani incident also was a part of the plan. No one on earth can justify firing there. The manner in which it was done is simply deplorable.

### **What was the Plan?**

The chief minister J Jayalalithaa promptly issued a statement that it was a caste conflict between Thevars and Pallars and tried to colour it as a caste issue. She had stated in the Assembly on September 12 that the Paramakudi episode was the “culmination of a chain of events” triggered by a defamatory graffiti against Pasumpon Muthuramalinga Thevar written on a wall at Mandalamanickam village by miscreants and the subsequent murder of T. Palanikumar, a higher secondary school student of Pacheri Dalit hamlet on September 9...” In the face of it, it was intriguing how her police killing people in the name of law and order becomes a caste conflict. While both the castes should be commended for having maintained their cool in the face of such provocation, what the chief minister perhaps unintendedly revealed is what lies at the root of the episode. The incident has clear overtone of the on-going caste conflict between Thevars and Pallars in southern Tamil Nadu. It is important to understand the dynamics of this conflict and its implication to the vote bank politics of Tamil Nadu.

As though to preempt the doubt about the professionalism of the state police in what would come after 20 days in paramakudi, the

chief minister Jayalaithaa, who also holds Police and Home portfolios, made this announcement proudly in the Budget session of the State Assembly on August 24: “The Tamil Nadu Police, in its modern avatar, reflects a glorious tradition of over a century and a half. It was the only force to embark on State-sponsored modernisation in the early 1990s which was pioneered by me during my first tenure as Chief Minister from 1991 to 1996. Seizing the opportunity, the Tamil Nadu Police transformed itself into a mature and modern force with a humane face and unique approach to people and problems....” One may just consider a comment on making of Tamil Nadu police in southern districts, with which we are concerned, in a celebrated report by Human Rights Watch in contrast:

“The Thevar Peravai (Thevar Front), the most active and organized of Thevar organizations, was until early 1998 led by retired Director General of Police (DGP) Pon Paramaguru. His successor, dr. n sethuraman, was also the general secretary of moovendar Munnetra Kazhagam, a political party launched by the all india Thevar Pearavai in 1998.

During his tenure as DGP from 1972 to 1975, Paramaguru recruited many Thevars into the Police Force. J Jayalalitha, leader of the AIDMK,. Was considered a “strong Thevar community supporter” during her-year tenure as chief minister of the state from 1991 to 1996. Her support included extending influential political and police positions to members of the Thevar community, allowing them to further consolidate their power base... Lawyers, human rights activists and the local press have noted that, as a result, a majority of the police force in the southern districts now ‘hails from the thevar caste and, often have been unable to overcome their affiliation.”

*Thevars are the dominant caste cluster, generally called as 'Mukkulathors' comprising Kalars, Marwars and Agamudayar in southern Tamil Nadu. They claim descent from the clans of Chera, Chola and Pandian, and thus a kingly past. As in earlier days kings*

*were portrayed as gods, they claim that they were called Thevar, meaning god (distortion of Sanskrit deva, for god). Not to be left behind, Pallars also claim their regal descent from none other than the king of gods, Indra. They prefer to call themselves as Mallar or Devendra Kula Vellalar. They invoke ancient Sangam literature to claim that they were the ancient people originating in the Marutam land, situated near a river. They also claim to be the first cultivators of rice in Tamil Nadu. Both the communities thus have created their competing mythologies to claim the glorious descent despite the fact that not before many years, some of the components of Thevars were classed as the criminal tribes by the colonial rulers and the Pallars continued to be the untouchables. As Geetha observed in her recent piece, the thevar ideologues tend to reaffirm their proud past in perverse manner akin to varnadharma which “requires them to treat dalits with contempt, in keeping with the logic of graded inequality.”*

The Pallar caste is considered to be the most populous caste among the 76 Scheduled Castes in Tamil Nadu. Ramaiah (2004), citing figures from the 1981 census, states that out of the total Schedule Caste population excluding the Adi Dravida - a category consisting of number of Schedule Castes - the Pallars constituted the maximum with 27.60 per cent followed by the Paryar with 22.96 per cent, the Chakkiliyar with 14.29 per cent and the Artinthathiyar with 11.81 per cent. A majority of Pallars (33.4%) reside in Thanjavur district followed by Madurai (21.2%) and Ramanathapuram (about 3%) districts. Though in most of the villages the Scheduled Castes are spread in small numbers, there are villages exclusively made up of Pallars. Compared to Parayars, most of the Pallars own land and therefore tend to be more aggressive, socially and politically conscious, more militant and better organized. Pallars tend to refer to themselves by their caste name so that they are not amalgamated with other lower castes. ‘Pallar` unlike other dalit caste names, is not associated with any defiling occupations; it refers to agriculture and allied activities in which primarily the Pallars are engaged. They have

been noted as a class of agricultural labourers. The Pallars maintain their caste superiority also by means of not eating beef which the other Scheduled Castes do. It is said that when Ramvilas Paswan visited Paramakudi and was generally referring them as Dalits, someone told him that they were not dalits.

Thevars are the dominant land owning caste but many of them continue to remain as small and marginal farmers and even as agricultural labourers. Over the recent decades, they built up substantial social capital through their presence in cinema, in local administration, in political parties. In contrast, Pallars built their cultural capital through higher education, government jobs and migrating to other countries like Gulf countries Malaysia and Singapore . With some capital accumulation, they have also entered some businesses. For instance, i n the towns of Paramakudi, Muthukulathur and Ramanathapuram, they have entered trading by setting up commission shops for agricultural products, etc. All these developments have taken place during the past 15 years (1977-1992). In their new role as landholders, small traders and employees in non-farm sector, a section of the Pallars has freed themselves from the every-day oppression of agricultural employment in Thevar-owned farms.

These developments have changed the contours of the conflict between Thevars and Pallars during the last two decades. Pallars' economic independence coupled with educational advancement has posed serious threat to the hegemony of the Thevars in the area. As a result, Thevars tend to affirm their authority through violence. Pallars also organized themselves against the onslaught of Thevars and began to respond in the tit for tat manner. In earlier conflicts it was mostly the Pallars who lost their lives and property but in recent caste riots both the tally of deaths and the loss of property are more or less evenly distributed between the two castes. Moreover, because of their organization, the local caste conflicts do not remain any longer local and quickly spread to other parts engulfing a large area. In southern

Tamil Nadu, the behavior of these two communities was largely conditioned by the spirit of enmity.

Because of their numbers and organization, they have been important vote bank for any political party. The AIDMK under MGR and later on under the present Chief Minister J Jayalalitha however have succeeded in winning their confidence. Jayalalithaa's soft Hindutva line came handy for them to exercise their vendetta against the Pallars. As Geetha observed, "Ever since the AIDMK under MGR and later on under the present Chief Minister J Jayalalitha have chosen to patronize the Thevars (and the other sub-castes that are linked to them, including the Kallars and the Maravars), community leaders in the southern districts have reaffirmed their caste authority and hegemony by taunting, insulting and inflicting violence on dalits who dare to defy their diktats. Political support in fact has earned them an impunity that is explained away in terms of their so-called 'primeval' will to acts of violent anger. It is not surprising that they are troubled by the memory of Immanuel Sekaran, his martyrdom, since it has persisted as a defiant symbol of dalit militancy." During the last DMK rule, this symbol received substantial boost. Since 2007, there has been visible increase in the numbers that congregated at Paramakudi for the guru puja and the demand for it being declared as the state function had taken root. In 2010, clearly with the mediation of the DMK, the central government had issued a postal stamp in memory of Immanuel Sekaran. From 2007, the Pallars have been using with impunity the epithets that symbolized their guru, Muthuramlinga Thevar and responding to them in every defiant way. Now that Jayalalithaa has come to power, they needed a concrete demonstration from her that she is firmly on their side. On her part, Jayalalithaa also needed to reconsolidate the Thevar block in reconfiguring her constituency by discarding the unreliable vote-groups.



For the forthcoming local elections, she has already dishonoured the traditional coalition arrangement. Pallars, although showing increasing degree of organization vis-à-vis Thevars, are in relatively small numbers and do not reflect political cohesion. The faction led by Dr Krishnasamy was allied with the AIDMK and won the two seats that were given to it. Others followed John Pandian's TMMK. John Pandian himself fought the 2011 assembly elections but lost to AIIDMK's Murugan in Mudukulathur constituency. In the overall vote bank assessment, Thevars surely score over Pallars and that precisely Jayalalithaa would do. There was a notice from Aapanattu Maravar Sangam calling for stopping the guru puja of Pallars. [See the Appendix] From Thevar view point, preventing the Immanuel Sekaran guru puja from becoming a major event or a state event is crucial to maintain their social dominance in the area. It almost symbolizes their recent battle against Pallars, which they cannot afford to lose. If the Pallar guru puja becomes a state function, the battle that Immanuel Sekaran had declared against the Thevars would be won by the dead Sekaran.

Here comes the plan; nay, intrigue for the vote bank politics. By firing upon the crowd of Pallars, the government is giving two simultaneous messages. To Pallars, it conveys that they should limit their enthusiasm and do not aspire to equate themselves with Pallars. It also tries to deter them from crowding at Paramakudi in huge numbers. To Thevars, it tells that the government is firmly on their side. Jayalalithaa's closest Thevar friend Shashikala would manage the loyalty of the community for the continued electoral success of the AIDMK. The forthcoming local elections will reveal the prowess of this plan!

Apart from the above core consideration, Jayalalithaa badly needed to enact some such event which will effectively dismantle the unity of people being built over the issue of Tamil nationalism. The execution of the death to Santhan, Murugan and Perarivalan accused of killing Rajiv Gandhi had spontaneously brought cross sections of Tamil people together. On Monday 29 August, the people had a successful

rail roko and a demonstration; students boycotted colleges and lawyers courts; and a dalit girl immolated herself. The next day (30 August), as the case was to come up for a review, 400 lawyers had collected from all over the state into the court. The court granted stay to the scheduled hanging. Jayalalithaa, who was against this demand all along strikes a master stroke by getting the resolution about clemency to be granted to the awardees of the death penalty passed in the Assembly. Although, for time being she had managed to diffuse the death penalty issue, the issue of Tamil nationalism could potentially crop up any time. This could be possibly prevented by igniting an issue of caste or community.

## **Recommendations**

### ***1.Palanikumar Murder Case***

In the melee of police firing at Paramakudi, the murder of Palanikumar, a 16 year old student is almost forgotten. As the media reported that he was murdered because he had scribbled some derogatory remarks against Muthuramaliga Thevar, one can realize what the police think of the case. As a matter of fact, the place where this so called scribbling was found just could not be reached by the boy. It is out and out a false alibi to soften the crime. Although reportedly some people are arrested in this connection, they need to be tried in an effective manner. One hopes, the police have put proper charge sheet under IPC as well as Atrocity Act. The state should constitute a panel of lawyers belonging to dalit community to oversee the investigation and make a tight case for prosecution.

### ***2.State in guru Pujas***

In Tamil Nadu, the electoral politics transcends newer and newer highs of ludicrous. The political parties vie with each other in enticing voters with declaration of largess in their manifestos, which began from the subsidized rice to free colour televisions and now free laptops. Apart from these cash equivalent bribery, the parties after

coming to power use the government to further their electoral interests. There would be numerous instances of this nature, where state has illegitimately lent its support to some partisan cause. The subject incident underscores the state support to the Thevar guru puja, which is ostensibly done by a caste in the caste name. It is obnoxious to see the state functionaries attending the Thevar guru puja every year. Although the people should be free to perform such pujas, the constitutional state should keep away from them.

### *3. Observance of police Manual*

Over the years, the incidents of police highhandedness have been increasing. It is mainly because the politicians use police as their agent. The arbitrary arrests, levying of false charges, selective laxity in investigation, torture in custody, beating and firing upon people are rampantly done with impunity. It has become a norm to take these things as normal. The police being the face of the state to the people needs to be closely watched for its conduct and behavior. They should be made accountable for their actions and inactions. The violation of the rule book by them should be taken seriously and they should be tried not only for the dereliction of duty but also for delinquency.

### *4. Citizens' committee to Oversee Police Firing Incident*

The incidents of police firing are increasing in number. They are basically meant to terrorize people into submission but are invariably projected as the acts in self defence and to protect the public property. The stories of police bandaging themselves and indulging into destruction of properties in order to justify their action have been noted by civil rights groups in many fact finding missions. The state has never taken a note of this novel strategy of police. In order to curb the recurrence of these incidents we would recommend an independent citizen's committee with involvement of civil rights activists be constituted and empowered to carry out immediate investigation in such episodes. Their report and evidence should be

honoured by the state to take immediate action like suspension of the guilty police officers, pending formal proceeding against them.

### **Demands**

- The state police has completely lost moral right to investigate into this case and hence the case be handed over to the CBI for investigation.
- The police responsible for the criminal act of killing and beating innocent people should be charged under the Atrocity Act as well as for the murder under IPC. Some names that prominently figure are: M/s Senthilvelan (DCP), Sandip Mittal (IG), Elangovan (DSP), Siva kumar (PI), Gajendran (PI), Shanmuganathan (SI)
- Pending investigation, the above and other officials involved in the process of granting permission for fire (such as Siva Kumar, Tehsildar, Paramakudi) should be summarily suspended.
- All the arrested people should be released forthwith.
- All the false cases foisted on people in this episode should be dropped.
- The relief of Rs 1 lakh announced by the government to the deceased is ridiculous. Since the state has killed or maimed people for no reason, the state should compensate the families for the loss of potential earning of the dead. It should buy them annuities worth minimum Rs 5000 per month for 40 years.
- All injured people should be given Rs 1 lakh as compensation besides the reimbursement of their medical expenses.
- The coming state sponsored Thevar jayanthi is surely to repeat police atrocities on Dalits. The government should ensure that Dalits are not harassed.

- The government support to certain community's 'guru pooja' is at the root of this and other such problems. They are purely a caste-function. It is unbecoming of a secular state to do so. We condemn the state behavior and demand it withdraws from such indulgence.

## *Appendix*

**Aappanattu Maravar Sang**  
**Ramachandran, K.Muthuramalingam,**  
**President Treasurer**

The Thevar Marriage Hall in Mthukulathoor, Ramnad district was built by raising fund amongst the Maravars in Ramnad. It was built by the Maravar community for the developmental works of the Maravars. Today 34 persons have declared that this hall was registered in their name in 1993 and only they have all the rights regarding the hall. Stating that they have records to prove their claim, they have stated that the right over the hall will be passed on to their next generations and the Maravars cannot question this. Further they have also stated that they can sell or rent out this property and if the Maravars need to use the space for any function they will have to pay rent to the 34 people as the Maravar community has no legal right over the hall. They have also passes a resolution in this regard. In order to scuttle such nefarious plans of these 34 people and also to plan for the upcoming Thevar guru puja we request all Aapanattu Maravars to come under one administration and one leadership and attend the meeting to be held on September 18th in Thevar marriage hall, after the 5 people remembrance day(sep14).

Important request, as many leaders of our community will be attending the 5 people remembrance day we will have to make it a big celebration and also in recent time Immanuel Sekaran's guru puja is celebrated like that of Thevar guru puja and those attending the function are also increasing every year demanding to announce it as a

state function, in order to sabotage this we request all Maravars from all the village to assemble at Keelathuval.

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# Modi Vomits Caste Venom

10 May, 2010

On 25 April 2010 Narendra Modi is reported to have observed while releasing his book Samajik Samrasata that Dalits were like mentally retarded children. It created uproar in the Congress circles. Praveen Rashtrapal of the Congress sought to raise the issue in the Rajya Sabha but having been denied permission by the deputy chairman K Rahman Khan, the Congress members trooped into the well of Rajya Sabha and caused a ruckus forcing its adjournment. Earlier, Modi had said that Valmiki community was involved in manual scavenging for a “spiritual experience”. Activist circles were stirred with indignation and began discussing whether Modi could be booked under the Atrocity Act. The legal luminaries may decide whether this is feasible or not given the fact that he would certainly invoke spirit in which he said it, which may obviate the application of the Act. Modi posturing as the great spastic patron may plead that he said it for taking special care of Dalits as we do of the mentally retarded children.

This Modi speak in someway represents the thinking of most upper caste people. Not many people realize that this display of magnanimity is basically the worst expression of casteism rooted in the ideology of Brahmanism and as such deserves all round condemnation.

## **Stink of Brahmanism**

The basic premise of Brahmanism is that people are created unequal by God in accordance with their merit in the previous birth. They should reconcile with this divine order and only practice their dharma to earn merit points in order to get better birth next time. The paternalistic attitude of the upper castes towards these fallen people is basically informed by this ideology. It assumes that Dalits are lesser beings and they are superior; being noble born it is their duty to have

pity on Dalits, help them perform their dharma to ameliorate their destiny. This attitude is displayed so casually in self congratulatory manner that they do not have even inkling that it is most humiliating to Dalits. It is worse than insulting them with their caste names, which may be considered as cognizable crime as per the Atrocity Act.

It is precisely for this reason that Ambedkar had denounced Gandhi's harijan and dismissed the Congress attempts at wooing Dalits through Harijan Sevak Sangh as the 'Congress plan to kill Untouchables by kindness.' Not only Gandhi, who was anyway propelled by political considerations, Ambedkar did not take kindly even the bhakti saints' self pity or tame criticism of the caste system because they did not question the basic ideology behind it. His repeated denouncement of the then Mahar attempts to claim descent and or derive inspiration from the bhakti poet of fourteenth century, Chokhamela underscores the same logic. He saw the act of bhakti saints as the act of subservience to the will of God, and as conformist and anti-revolutionary. Anything that even faintly smells of this obnoxious ideology becomes thus insulting to Dalits. Modi's statement stinks!

### **Spastic Minds, Sick Society**

Modi is unduly presumptuous about his intelligence in regarding Dalits as mentally retarded. Firstly, the creed he swears by fundamentally treats him, a member of Shudra, as dumb. As such he may not be particularly in position to pontificate on others' retardedness. Secondly, if he is truly intelligent, he must know that the disability, mental retardation or whatever, is not with Dalits but with the society. It is the Hindu society which is sick not Dalits. Dalits have definitely been infected by this sickness, insofar as they too have emulated this sickly system among themselves. They are surely infected because despite Ambedkar's clarion call for annihilation of castes, many of them foolishly cling to the idiom of caste. But that's another matter. Important thing is to see the society as sick because it is incapable of treating its own people equal. It is



also mentally retarded as it could not learn from its long history of slavery, which is directly attributed to its myopic notion of caste division of society. Modi had better learnt to be a statesman and think of how to cure this society of its dilapidating sickness.

This is a serious point which is totally missed in reservation discourse. To think of Dalits as disable is pure Brahmanism. Dalits needed reservation not because they lacked merit or skills, but because the societal prejudice will never let them get their dues. With imposed backwardness over two millennia they did look weak to start with, which created an erroneous impression that reservation was a kind of helping hand. It has done a great damage. If reservation had been conceived as the countervailing measure to force society to behave, it would have been contingent upon the society overcoming its disability. The onus to do that would be upon society. Today it is on none, making the reservations appear perpetual and hence a cause of eternal conflict. Worse, with this 'helping hand' notion it has become a game to be played by unscrupulous politicians at the cost of polity.

### **Modi's Slippery Samarasata**

What Modi spoke is basically RSS's samarasata solution to castes. It aims at strengthening the Hindu identity for its communal agenda. It believes in the greatness of Hindus, their religion, culture and everything and wants to regain it. Naturally, it does not see anything wrong with the varna or caste system, the defining components of the 'Hindu'. In justifying it, its protagonists indulge in all kinds of ideological acrobatics and make things confusing for gullible people. A typical gem of wisdom on castes in its repertoire is taken from Golwalkar who gave a slogan - 'sab jaati mahaan, sab jaati samaan' (All castes are great and all castes are equal), which seems to inform the samarasta project. Actually, in this lofty declaration, Golwalkar has not made any departure from the orthodox Brahmanist position which argues that all the varnas ( and castes) were the parts of same virat purush and hence equal. What it truly means is that all the

castes should perform their assigned tasks as their dharma. Valmiki should continue to scavenge and Modi should rule!

Actually Samarasata is the expedient political strategy of the Sangh Pariwar, inaugurated in Pune in April 1983. Until then, RSS did not feel particular necessity to woo Dalits in a conscious manner. What prompted this realization is the increasing competition in electoral politics in the impending coalition era in which Dalit votes could make a big difference. The decline of Dalit movement and degeneration of Dalit politics provided fertile ground to seed such a strategy. After the fall of Janata Dal government, the old Bharatiya Jan Sangh dissolved itself and formed a new party – Bharatiya Janata Party in 1980, which needed to try out new strategies. The main project the samarasata manch, the platform created for the purpose, undertook is to saffronize Ambedkar and paint the RSS gurus in radical colours. It worked with some half baked Dalit intellectuals but did not make much headway with people.

Samarasata means social harmony. Like Dengist China replaced the Maoist lingo of class struggle with social harmony, the samarasata means that various castes should coexist without conflict. How could castes in exploitative relations with each other coexist in harmony except for internalizing Manu's ideology? It is here we can get the import of Modi's statement about Valmiki's 'spiritual experience' in carrying the upper caste shit on their heads. It is a shame, that such a grave atrocity as removing human excreta by humans, officially banned way back in 1993 by the Government of India, is eulogized as 'spiritual experience'. No Dalit ever cared for 'spiritual'; his concern has been solely material. If Modi values this 'spiritual experience', as he seems doing, anyone of the 14 lakh scavengers in the country will gladly handover his/her shovel and bucket to him. He must know as the chief minister of the state that Safai Karmachari Andolan has given a call for abolition of this atrocity by the end of 2010.

**Congress' Fake Concern**

It is curious to see Congress agitated over the issue. Actually, Modi in a way voiced his concern for Dalits in the grand Gujarati tradition embodied in the word 'harijan' or in the idea of trusteeship that the rich people could go on enriching themselves but hold their wealth in trust for the weak in the society. Both incidentally came from Mahatma Gandhi, the patron saint of the Congress. Gandhi has been perhaps the pioneer in creating an ascriptive and patronizing label for Dalits in modern times. While he always claimed to identify with and represent the Untouchables, he has also used the term like 'uncultured' and 'dumb' for them highlighting his distance and difference from masses. Look at this advice from Gandhi to the caste Hindu workers for the Harijan cause: "Workers in the Harijan cause... must come in closest touch with utterly unsophisticated, innocent, ignorant men and women who might be likened to children in intelligence." [Harijan, 07.11.1936] Is there any difference in this and Modi's calling Dalits retarded?

Of course, Modi as a committed functionary of the RSS would openly uphold the tenets of Manusmriti that takes Dalits as inherently inferior. The Congress would never do so. It enjoyed BJP being condemned as communal and casteist by the progressive elements in the country. But as the vanguard of the ruling classes has it been any different? Its track record in communalism is at best suspect. Its dealing with Dalit issues has been surely muddied. Right from the days of Poona Pact that robbed Dalits of their political autonomy to the unscrupulous co-optation phase of Dalit politics, its role comes out antithetical to its own projection as friend of Dalits. The only difference between it and the BJP perhaps is in the intricacy of its strategy. While BJP appears muddled with its communal agenda, the Congress looks smart without any ideological anchors.

Interestingly, some years ago (around 2005), the Gujarat Congress had made a training programme for Congress workers at the instance of Sonia Gandhi. A course booklet was prepared for the purpose by one leader of the Gujarat Congress Seva Dal. This book had extolled praises on India's ancient culture and social order, based on Manu's

code and articulated the objective for the Congress as to bring back this social order. This issue was exposed by Valjibhai Patel of the Council for Social Justice, Ahmedabad through newspapers. Embarrassed by this exposure, Amarsingh Choudhari, the then Gujarat Pradesh Congress president had to express his regrets to Dalits for hurting their feelings and expunge that passage from the book. Can one still see any difference between the Congress and BJP with regard to their anti-Dalit Hindu vision?

Caste venom is deep drawn into the body politic of this country. Modis occasionally vomit it, the Congress successfully conceals it!

# Some Fundamental Issues in Anti-Caste Struggle

13 June, 2011

*[The transcription of the Inaugural Speech delivered at the biannual conference of the Kula Nirmulan Porata Samiti in Guntur, Andhra Pradesh on 11 June 2011.]*

Dear Comrades,

Yesterday in your public meeting I spoke about the crises and confusions dalits faced. Since it was a public meeting, I needed to sensitize people about the necessity of a KNPS like organization in order to struggle on the basic issues our people faced. Today, it is a conference of delegates that I am told to inaugurate and hence my perspective would be entirely different from yesterday. You have set annihilation of castes as your objective as the name of your organization—kula Nirmulan Porata Samiti suggests. It is a very inspiring objective because these days people scarcely speak about annihilating castes. They may be shouting slogans for it but through their behavior, they definitely give contrary impression. It is not annihilation but they want to zealously preserve castes. I hope KNPS means what I understood, that it wants castes be annihilated. That is the only hopeful feature of KNPS that appealed me and brought me to Guntur.

My objective here is to set the perspective for your deliberations. Towards that, I thought of raising certain fundamental issues. In order that you can effectively handle the tasks of this project of kula nirmulana, you should be equipped with clear understanding of these issues. I would therefore focus my speech on three or four very basic issues, the understanding of which, in my opinion is a must for you. These issues are 1. Caste, 2. Political power, 3. Representation logic and the resultant mode of struggle.

Take for instance the first issue of caste. Despite creation of so much noise against castes I do not see any clarity about castes in Dalit

circle. What they talk about castes is full of rhetoric, emotional outburst and meaningless stereotype. That kind of understanding will take you nowhere. If you want to annihilate castes, it is basic that you must understand them. You must know their essential characteristics, their existential form, and the sources of their sustenance. We are habituated to abuse Manu, as the originator of the caste code, not even pausing for a moment to think whether such a pervasive system could be created by a person, howsoever evil minded he or she may be, and least, imposed upon the entire subcontinent. The next obsession among our people is to speak about the caste in history. They curiously relish wearing researcher's garbs and speculate over the origin of caste system. One does not know why they are so much interested in the past. One may understand the logic of this exercise if the caste system had remained unchanged through its history of a couple of millennia and the ancient past of India had been reliably readable. Because then one could expect to see the roots of the system and think of strategies to strike at its root for its annihilation. But unfortunately both these premises do not hold. Firstly, it is grossly wrong to assume that caste system has not changed through its long history. Although it gives an impression of being fossilized to impel, for instance, Marx to observe that India did not have history, the caste system actually has been continuously changing from within keeping its outer façade the same. The simplest evidence one could provide in support of this is the very existence of huge surplus population of certain dalit castes in every region of India. It could result only by disappearance of some caste vocations and/or merger of some castes. The caste system has been extraordinarily resilient and has adjusted itself to the changes in its environment. The second premise about the ancient India that one can comprehend it in historical sense is also grossly wrong. India did not have a sense of history and its ancient past is completely enveloped in mythologies. Therefore any attempt at digging it up with intention of locating roots of the caste system is sheer waste of energy and time. The second and the most practical approach therefore is to understand its existing form and strike at its

manifestation. For that a little knowledge of recent history, which incidentally is well documented would suffice. This history need not go beyond the colonial times. Because the major changes in caste system have come only since then. Marx while writing his pieces for the New-York Daily Tribune at the time of introduction of railway in India had observed that it would lead to establishment of capitalist industry and would eventually cause collapse of its decadent social systems like caste. As we know, India came to acquire second largest railway network in the world and a sizeable base of capitalist industry. But far from collapsing, the caste system appears going stronger as far as its vileness is concerned.

Everybody, including Marxists have lamented that Marx miserably failed in predicting the demise of the caste system. Some of them even accused him of being too simplistic about India. Last year while speaking in one of the prestigious universities in the US on the related topic, I said that Marx was damn right. There were many people who were very well versed about Indian history as well as Marx's writings. They were baffled because they were hearing for the first time ever someone saying that he was right. On their demand, I repeated myself and explained that the caste system as understood then based on rituals had really collapsed among the castes, mostly dwija castes, who adopted capitalism. After the transfer of power, the modernist developmental projects introduced by the Nehru government changed the entire countryside. These changes were significantly marked by the land reforms, howsoever half baked they may appear, and the green revolution that immediately followed them. The land reforms took away surplus lands from the upper caste landlords and transferred them to farming (shudra) caste tenants. Dalits tenants were mostly ignored because they did not figure in the revenue records and moreover the landlords preferred to transform their lands to their confidant shudra tenants than Dalits whom they despised as untouchables. The Green revolution that followed these reforms brought in huge productivity gains to the landowners. It was basically a capitalist strategy, which created input market, output market,

credit market and consequently money economy in the countryside. The traditional caste ordained jajmani relationship of interdependence collapsed and dalits were transformed into pure proletarians, totally relying on wage employment on the farms of the shudra caste landowners. As a part of this developmental paradigm, the dwija caste landlords vacated the villages in favour of nearby towns perceiving developmental opportunities there, leaving behind the baton of Brahmanism in the hands of neo rich, culturally unsophisticated shudra castes. The contradiction between the dalit wage labour and the shudra caste landowners began manifesting in the form of caste atrocities, marked by the infamous incident at Kilvenmani in Tamilnadu on 25 December 1968, in which the henchmen of the landlords burnt down 44 dalits, mostly women and children. Kilvenmani also inaugurated the new genre of caste atrocities, in terms of ferocity and cruelty reflecting uncultured response of the upwardly mobile shudra castes in villages. Karamchedu, Chundur in this state down to Khairlanji in my state can only be understood in light of these changes in the political economy of village India. Of course, one may have to consider the cultural arousal among dalits, attributed basically to Ambedkarite movement, despite their economic and political weakening, being the factor provocateur. The cultural arousal of dalits impelled them to resist any overture of the shudra castes, which acted as provocation for the unsophisticated shudras to unleash atrocity on Dalits. As Babasaheb Ambedkar way back in 1936 explained, the basic reason for atrocities remains the power asymmetry between dalits and non-dalits. During the first two decades after independence this power asymmetry has tremendously increased because of economic and political empowerment of a section of shudra farming caste and impoverishment and all round disempowerment of Dalits.

These changes in the caste system were unprecedented in its history. Blissfully, they easily passed by Dalit intellectuals. The agricultural surplus with the farming shudra castes flowed to nearby towns into small enterprises (such as cold storages, rice mills, ginning mills,



transport, contracting, etc.), transforming them into petty bourgeoisie. As the virtual lords of rural India, they became important node in the political nexus between villages and state capitals and then Delhi. Slowly they wielded political power, gradually capturing the institutions of local self government, such as gram panchayats, panchayat samitis, zilla parishads and became a major claimant of power even at the state level. While some of them had joined the national parties, many saw them incapable of accommodating their heightened aspirations and floated their own regional political parties. This phenomenon would bring in coalition mode of politics, which significantly precipitated in the form of Janata party that had come to power after the defeat of Mrs Indira Gandhi in 1977. Today these castes have become so powerful that they not only control political power, in so far as their numbers in local self institutions to parliament is concerned, they also control economic power.

While I am compelled to speak in terms of castes for no better option, I really hate this lingo. Because, although a section of this shudra caste cluster is a real oppressor of dalits today, it will be grave mistake to see the entire mass of shudra population as an enemy of dalits. There are as poor people, perhaps poorer than even Dalits, in this caste cluster but with the caste idiom they naturally identify with their leading caste-men and are available to do their bidding. Basically these caste ties are behind the formidable constituency the Pawars, Yadavs and your Reddys and Kammas have created. It is their practical need to have dalits around to bind non-dalits in villages together. Although at existential level majority of these labouring people of non-dalit shudra castes could easily make a common cause with dalits, the leading section of these castes would never let it happen.

These changes have brought about a radical change in caste configuration. As I said that the ritual castes differentiation among the dwija castes, who had adopted capitalist relations had almost collapsed, with the spread of capitalist relationship in the rural areas,

the Shudra caste cluster, which adopted these relations, got attached to the dwija castes cluster sans ritual caste differences. The caste system today therefore presents a clear class like division between Dalits and non-Dalits. It has become simpler than ever before to deal with this caste structure provided it is understood properly. While on the one hand castes have made themselves simpler to deal with, on the other hand because of their intermingling with the institutions of governance (e.g., elections, reservations), they have become complicated to deal with. Because this feature of castes, have made them a formidable weapon in the hands of the ruling classes, who would not let go of them easily.

When I see dalit vanguard fixated with the obsession against Manu or Brahmans, absolutely oblivious of such momentous changes around them, I feel pity for them. To my mind, it reflects callous attitude towards Dalit masses in rural areas as primarily these changes have impacted them adversely. The rural Dalits are not in position to comprehend them and simply follow their leaders. These vanguard elements have created a quasi godhead in the form of an Ambedkar icon which helps them gain abiding allegiance of rural masses of dalits. Any and everything can be sold in the name of Ambedkar. Common masses are not in position to discern the truth through a complex context in which certain things were said or done by Babasaheb Ambedkar. For instance, Babasaheb had said that Brahmanism and capitalism were two enemies of Dalits and elaborated that he was not against the Brahmans but their attitude, their creed. He went further and said provocatively that Brahmanism could well be found even among Dalits. He did condemn Manu as the creator of the caste code but it was in symbolic terms. If he had believed that a single person can write a code and entire society gets structured according to it, he would not have wasted his time to write lengthy books as to how the Shudras and Untouchables originated. But the Dalits have taken it literally and created an abstract enemy in the form of Manu and his minions, Brahmans. They identified Brahmans as their enemy and dalits as their automatic friends. While

doing johar to Ambedkar, they have really failed him. The most important contribution of Babasaheb Ambedkar is to give dalits a mantra of 'annihilation of castes'. What his followers did was the exact opposite—preservation and persistence of castes. Sadly their entire behavior is predicated upon caste identities.

In light of this analysis how foolish it looks to think of bahujan or dalit-bahujans in caste terms. I was sad to hear from KNPS platform many people speaking about SC, ST, BC, Minorities as though their unity is sans problem. It is utterly irrational repeating stereotypes despite contrary experiences. Is it not the sad fact that we could not even construct 'Dalit' in caste terms? Rather after eight decades of dalit movement, whatever 'dalit' existed, appears to be falling apart into its constituent subcastes. Ignoring this stark reality is it not foolish to think of unity of castes into bahujan or some such term. I do not have any quarrel over bahujan; rather I would very much want it to come into being soonest. But that bahujan will be on class basis. To conceive of bahujan any other way is just infeasible. All this euphoria about bahujan is the anxiety to achieve arithmetic permutation and combination for electoral gains. The success of BSP in UP created this mirage of bahujan for all the political class of dalits and their opportunist supporters in intellectuals to run after. I will deal with this matter after a while. But suffice it to say that to create bahujan on class line should be the aim of KNPS. I will be sad if it also falls prey to the popular stereotype and talks of infeasible unity of the castes.

I do know class is an anathema for Dalits. But is there any alternative? If you have proper understanding of caste, you will realize that caste can never be the basis of any organized radical struggle. The persistent failure of our movement is solely because of the fact that we have not understood what caste is. Babasaheb Ambedkar explained caste metaphorically as a multi storey tower, which does not have a staircase connecting the stories. Well, he has not elaborated this metaphor to project more important characteristics of castes. There was no problem if the caste system

was such a isolated clusters of communities held in whatever notion of hierarchy so long as they were autonomous. But it is not the case. These storeys have vertical relationship of exploitation and horizontal contention for superiority. Even that does not depict the full picture of caste. Each storey itself is a tower unto itself, representing the sub caste system and so on. This is the complexity of castes in conceptual terms. Caste seen thus reduces to a basic notion of hierarchy. Once speaking in one of the US universities, I provoked the audience with a weird definition of caste saying that the essence of caste is that Indians are intrinsically incapable of treating their interlocutors equal; either they think they are superior or they are inferior but never equal. That indeed is the case. Fortunately for us and India, this continuum of hierarchy is virtually collapsed into two segments—dalits and non-dalits. The point is that castes can never come together for any radical struggle. They have this inherent tendency to splinter. Let me just add that Babasaheb Ambedkar's struggle was actually based on class and not on caste.

At the time of articulating resistance to brahmanical oppression by people like Jotiba Phule, it appeared that various laboring castes – Phule's shudra and ati-shudras—would come together in fight against Brahmanism. They did to some extent. But soon the inevitable happened and the movement collapsed. The dalit movement was organized seemingly with people from more homogeneous pancham varna or the outcastes or the untouchables. It appeared more viable than the Jotiba's shudra-ati-shudra. In early days of the movement it also appeared that the castes other than Mahars (Ambedkar's own caste people who naturally constituted the core of his movement) were gravitating towards the leadership of Ambedkar. But by 1937, when the first general elections were held, they could be easily detached into the competing castes. Even after so many decades, after constructing the administrative category of Scheduled Castes, we have failed to bring together all the untouchable castes. Practically Dalits remained to a majority caste in every state/geographical region which having a similar profile to Mahars in Maharashtra, accepted

Babasaheb Ambedkar as their leader. The ruling classes could very easily prevent other castes from coming together and by now have promoted their own icons in contrast to Ambedkar. (Example could be Annabhau Sathe for Mangs in Maharashtra; Jagjivan Ram for the Madigas and so on)

Now we will go over to political power. This mantra popularized by Kanshiram has not only enthused but also mesmerized cross sections of Dalits. Kanshiram identified political power to be the key to all problems of dalits and pursued it single-mindedly. He has carefully shunned issue based agitations saying that once the Dalits gained political power, all these issues would get automatically resolved. In his formulation the economic deprivation of Dalits was predicated upon the absence of political power to Dalits. And political power for him was to be gained through the ballot box for which his strategy was to build a constituency of 85 per cent of people belonging to SCs, STs, BCs, and Minorities against the 15 per cent of the upper castes. He untiringly worked and stunned everyone by the electoral successes of his BSP. BSP has since shared political power in UP several times and in the last assembly elections, it surprised all cynics by winning absolute majority on its own with its controversial sarvajan strategy. This success has basically inspired many people to imagine that Dalits elsewhere also should follow this strategy and win political power.

Now I would invite your attention to the following facts. When one is dazzled by the success of BSP in UP, one should also pay attention to its failure to replicate this success elsewhere. BSP for instance has failed to make any mark in Punjab, Kanshiram's own state, which has maximum population of SCs-- 29 percent as against 21 percent in UP. The reason for its success in UP is the combination of the unique demography of Dalits in UP and their preparedness to revive the movement which had suffered setback by desertions of the erstwhile RPI leaders like BP Marurya, Sanghpriya Gautam, etc. UP has 21 percent population of Dalits but over 80 percent of it belongs to a single caste cluster called Jatav Chamars, which means there is 16 plus percent of solid and sure dalit votes in UP, which by any

reckoning becomes formidable in the fractured polity of that state. UP had a strong movement led by the Scheduled Caste Federation and later by the Republican Party of India. It was not Maharashtra but UP which sent maximum RPI representatives to the state assembly and parliament. It however had a lull when the RPI leaders joined the ruling class parties. With such a unique background the BSP worked in UP systematically cultivating its constituency and created a formidable position for itself in the realm of electoral politics. Despite all out efforts to replicate this success, with a huge resource base built up with the help of political power in UP, it could not make any headway in any other state. This much for the success of BSP!

Now listen carefully how BSP's conception of political power stands on its head. Political power is basically a derivative of the control on means of production, which is achieved by people by waging concerted struggle against the entrenched propertied classes. Even in the non-economic sense, power would be construed as the counter hegemony of the socially oppressed people secured through struggles against the hegemonic classes. Kanshiram totally averted both these socio-cultural and economic realms of struggle and only focused on the electoral realm. The BSP did have electoral success and catapulted 'daughter of a dalit' to the chief ministership of the largest state in India. But in absence of these struggles, the people remained divorced from real power. Mayawati certainly became powerful but within the framework of the bourgeoisie-landlord state, the characteristics of which could not even be scratched. It is therefore we see, despite the costly propaganda she has been indulging in periodically, the ground reality in UP remains the same as it would have been in anybody's rule. Rather there appears to be some amount of backlash by the cultural assertion she indulged in by creating memorials after dalit icons to consolidate her constituency as seen in the rising incidence of caste atrocities on Dalits. Atrocities, indisputably is a concentrated expression of casteism and gauged by this parameter, she has failed to arrest casteism in her own rule. Political power in the hands of a dalit

person does not become dalit power. It only means that person is presiding over the assemblage of dominant classes. Strategically it suits those classes to have such an arrangement because it calms down the lower strata without much cost. You should seriously consider these points so as not to fall prey to the superficial propaganda. I am all for political power for dalits and would like KNPS to make it as its goal. But it should not distort the meaning of political power as done by BSP. Political power can never accrue to Dalits without incessant struggle against the entrenched classes. A dalit person reaching the seat of power may even be counterproductive because the illusion of power thus created could slow down the pace of struggle. This has rather happened in UP as elsewhere.

Somewhat related but demanding an exclusive treatment because of its pivotal importance is the representational logic, the third point of my speech. The representational logic is belief that a representative of community in organs of government will take care of the interests of the community. This logic could be seen at the core of the dalit movement. Babasaheb Ambedkar right from his evidence to the Southborough Committee in 1919 demanded representation to Dalits with this logic. He always imagined that Dalit in order to be effective representatives of their community should be higher educated like him. He might be an exception to the galaxy of great people advocating universal primary education, who has advocated higher education. Jotiba Phuley had started primary schools; Dr Ambedkar opened Siddharth college! When he became a member of the viceroy's executive council, he got 20 odd dalit students sent to Europe for higher education. It would be difficult to recall the names of these students today by even the ardent researcher of the dalit movement. Leave apart their contribution to society; they even did not acknowledge the debt of Dr Ambedkar. At one time, he urgently needed some money and sent for getting it from one of these fellows who was well placed in the job at Delhi. He did not get it. In 1953 in a public meeting in Agra, Babasaheb Ambedkar had to publicly speak

against these educated people that they had cheated him. Many a private conversation, he expressed this feeling to his confidants.

This logic is so deep entrenched in the collective psyche of Dalits that they would never doubt it. Basically, it is a corollary of the caste obsession. The entire scheme of reservation is premised on this logic. This is not a place to evaluate this scheme but a broad brush evaluatory comment would not be out of place. Reservation basically benefits an individual but it is given in the name of community. The individual who benefits by reservation is supposed to take care of the community interests. Does it really happen? Do the politicians who get into parliament work for Dalits? Many people may innocently respond in affirmative because they have been indoctrinated into believing so. But the evidence is contrary. In my analysis of Khairlanji (read my books *Khairlanji: A bitter and Strange Crop* or *The Persistence of Caste*), I have noted that almost entire state machinery connected with Khairlanji was manned by Dalits and a stray exception belonged to the OBC. Despite that Khairlanji was almost suppressed; when it could not, it distorted the evidence such that eventually nothing would happen to the real culprits. We have commonplace experience that our IAS, IPS or such officers hardly empathize with dalit masses. It is understood that they just become a peg in the giant wheel of administration but beyond that they feel the counter pressure to prove that they are not communally biased. Whatever may be the reasons, the experience is that the Dalit officers prove of little or no use to common dalits and sometime they could be worse than the non-Dalits. What we need to note is that reservation system demands community to bear the cost and benefits a stray individual to cut him off the community. This asymmetrical design is never questioned by anyone and rather is upheld by Dalits. There is no denying the fact that reservation has done good to Dalits as a countervailing force against the prejudices of the larger society against them. But they needed to fine-tune it for its intrinsic bias to benefit the beneficiaries, which expand inequities and give rise to Mala-Madiga syndrome.



The representational logic has actually not worked the way it is assumed by Dalits, viz., as the sole measure of their advancement or as a mechanism of sharing power. It only served to create illusion for the masses. Dalits get elated to see their man or woman become a president, minister, chief minister or some state dignitary. There is no objective analysis whether their elation is really justified by the acts of these individuals. Over the six long decades, Dalits have reached all possible high places but over ninety percent Dalits have remained where they were. There is no realization that these individuals are basically picked up by the establishment for their capacity to serve the system, which includes its anti-Dalit agenda. This brings in the necessity of understanding the characteristics of state, which is Achilles hill for Dalits. Why should the state, which Dalits in their language call it a Brahman Baniya state (the upper castes state) should pick up certain Dalit individuals only for nomination? They get post-facto attribution of merit. But it is false. If you take a look for such nominations, most people who get picked up by the state were at the most mediocre even among Dalits. There were more capable Dalits than them but they would not be picked up simply because the state is not be sure of them. After all, the state co-opts co-optable elements and represses the not co-optable ones. That is the age old strategy. Instead of such simple thoughts coming to their mind, Dalits blindly celebrate the success of such individuals who become prop of the system as they effectively 'manage' their communities.

KNPS must discuss these fundamental issues to plan out their action programme. Most of our premises and understanding, which have driven our movement, have been erroneous. The pathetic state that we find ourselves as a community in is largely because of these errors. Therefore it is very necessary for us to examine carefully our experience vis-à-vis these fundamental issues. I am merely presenting my viewpoint but there are no pretensions about their infallibility. There is nothing that is right or wrong for all times or infallible for any time. Every thing is relative; relative to its time and space. If we

realize that the caste is incapable as a category to organize people for a radical struggle, or the need to slowly orient ourselves to class line; how do we do it? Do I mean the same thing as the so called Marxists have been telling us: caste is a myth and only class is real? No I hold them responsible for creating the idiotic duality of class and caste. If these people, equipped as they were with advanced tools of analysis provided by Marxism, had really understood Marxism, they would not have left caste as a super-structural residue in their class analysis of the Indian society. With brahmanic ethos of following a given word, a la ved vakya, these people tried to fit in the Indian reality into the borrowed mould of classes from Europe and when they found that caste did not fit within it, they kept it aside as a residue of feudalism which will disappear after the proletarian revolution succeeds. If the castes were the pervasive reality of the Indian social system, extending from the realm of production to the realm of spirit, as all of them vie with each other in their claim to correctness, the class analysis of India should have verily embedded castes. It is a pity that even Leftist intellectuals, have not noticed this blunder. Even if they had followed Lenin's definition of class, they would have not committed this grave error.

What does one do now? Does one just give up caste identities and sublimate to a class as certain Marxists would like to see us doing? That would be utterly ahistorical. Caste is not a maya to be wished away. The Left advice still smacks of their age old maxim that caste was something subordinate to class, a part of superstructure. I would advise them to shut up and relearn the basics of Marxism. We must transcend caste identities, but the way of doing so is not sublimating to class. This vile identity of caste defines everything of us in life which cannot evaporate away just by wishing so. It will itself require a step by step struggle. While battling against the casteist elements and their prop in the system, we have to definitely orient along class line. The struggle against caste would surely be based on identity of Dalits but it still need not be against the non-Dalits. It will be against the anti-Dalits. The struggle could follow two pronged strategy. One

is to extend hand to all the progressive elements and the non-Dalit masses who are identically placed as Dalits in their life-world. This would expand their constituency and make the task easier. After all, the castes cannot be annihilated by Dalits alone; it's a task of larger society to burry them. Two, it could be ready to smash the obstinate and pig-headed elements if they do not see the reason. I call this a shock therapy, which is needed to root out certain deep drawn cultural ills. In my book *Anti-Imperialism and Annihilation of Castes*, I have indicated how this approach will spirally strengthen the anti-caste as well as revolutionary movement and eventually accomplish the revolution of annihilating castes and reaching proletarian class rule. Pity that there is no discussion of this proposition in dalit circles! To a Mala-Madiga problem, I had given a simple solution of prioritizing prospective reservation to the dalit families who have not availed of the reservation benefits. I know, howsoever I tell them, Dalits do not wish to believe that their holy cow of reservation has died long ago. But so far as these ill conceived disputes among Dalits are concerned, they should see reason and take note of the solution some one offered. My solution has a great advantage that while it conceded caste based reservation, it does not strengthen caste identity and moves away to a secular family identity. If Dalits honestly wanted castes to die, they would have upheld such solutions. Instead they completely ignore it. Their behaviour variously underscores that they want castes to survive. Castes, as though, are their treasure which they would never give up; they would preserve their shitty caste identities with utmost zeal. I wish I am proved wrong but unfortunately I do see no signs of it. While shouting 'johar BR Ambedkar', they do not realize that they are the greatest betrayers of his mission.

I know I have ruthlessly ruffled many a feather of your notions and hurt some of you in process. But that is what I believe to be my task. The wrongs of our movement are so deep drawn that only such shocks, repeated shocks, could correct it. As an activist-intellectual I have to be honest and truthful. That is precisely what I do and did. I

see KNPS differently but even anywhere I would not have minced my words. I only hope that you all would seriously ponder over these fundamental points and reorient your struggle onto the right track.

Inquilab Zindabad!

# Playing Foul With The Oppressed

08 August, 2011

In its name itself, Maharashtra dons the rhetorical armour of being “great”. In hard matters of economy, the colonial gift of Mumbai—the capitalist hub of India – still covers up its lack of development and puts it in the statistical lead in the ranking of states of the Indian union. In matters of culture and history, it takes for granted its pre-eminence; one of its litterateurs of yesteryears, Acharya Atre, wrote “Only Maharashtra has history; others have geography”. But when it comes to dalits and other such oppressed people, its rhetoric knows no bounds; it becomes a Mecca of social justice, a la Maharashtra of Phule-Ambedkar, notwithstanding the Khairlanjis and a callous record of dealing with caste atrocities.

The current instance of disowning its responsibility towards 13 lakh school students from these marginalised social groups goes beyond callousness; it reveals how the state government plays foul and unscrupulous games with the oppressed.

## **‘Freeship’ Scheme**

From 1970 onwards, Maharashtra had a “freeship” scheme for the students belonging to the scheduled castes, vimukta jati, nomadic tribes and special backward classes. This arrangement has been reiterated through its circulars emphasising that students from these categories will get free education from Standard 1 to 10 in all schools irrespective of their parents’ income. In 1996, well after the adoption of neo-liberal policies, the government explicitly stated that this freeship will be applicable to all “non-government recognised, aided and non-aided schools” as per the standard rate. As such, the schools kept on getting a fee reimbursement for their students belonging to the above “backward” categories from the social welfare department of the government. Around 2000, a dispute arose because of a discrepancy between the amount sanctioned by the school education

department as the standard rate and the amount sanctioned for reimbursement by the social welfare department. At the instance of the courts, the government issued an order on 15 November 2000 that it would reimburse fees for all students at prescribed rates. On 27 May 2003, one more order was issued which, inter alia, said that “the fee structure and its quantum and criteria will be decided by the social welfare department and the Scheduled Tribes Department”.

Notwithstanding the convoluted circulars, which usually help governments to strangle whatever little progressive content their policies have, in this case the responsibility for reimbursement, whatever its quantum, was never denied. Interestingly, the scheduled tribe students were administratively segregated from these categories, their fees being sanctioned/reimbursed by the scheduled tribes department, entirely at different rates compared to those authorised by the education or social welfare departments.

### **Retrograde Retraction**

Then, without any communication, the social welfare department stopped reimbursement of fees to schools from 2007. The schools pursued the matter with the government for some time but to no avail. They were verbally informed that “it was a mistake” that they got reimbursements so far. The schools did not have any option other than to ask parents to pay the fees. Some schools carried on for some time, some threatened not to declare the results unless the fees were paid, and some simply asked the students to go away. Parents also responded variously according to their capability. The real sufferers were the students, who ultimately bore the brunt of the anxieties of their schools, as well as their parents. The matter was eventually taken to Court in 2010 by both.

On 21 December last year, the government pleader informed the Court that the decision on the report submitted by the committee constituted on 18 February 2010 recommending the rates at which reimbursement of fees should be made by the government would be

decided upon within a month. Secretaries of both the key departments, viz, social justice and finance, were present in the Court. The committee comprising the principal secretary, social justice, as president; principal secretary, tribal development department; secretary, school education department; and secretary, rural development department; as members, and director, directorate of social welfare, Pune, as member-secretary, had provided three options, but recommended a fee reimbursement at the highest rate (option 3), irrespective of the actual claims by the schools. It had provided an estimate of the number of students as 13 lakh and a rough calculation of the financial burden in a range from Rs 226.20 crore to Rs 382.20 crore, corresponding to option 1 and option 3. Contrary to its earlier indication that the government will take a decision on these recommendations, the government communicated to the Court its decision taken on 10 March 2011 that it will not reimburse fees. The Court noted that the stand adopted by the state government was not only arbitrary and unreasonable, but that it violated Article 14, Articles 21 and 21A read with Articles 45 and 46 of the Constitution, and hence ruled that the government reimburse the schools as per option 1 (lowest) along with the arrears within six weeks. It explicitly rejected the plea of the government to stay the order even as the latter had decided to appeal against the order in the Supreme Court.

Accordingly, the government should have deposited the amount of arrears with the schools by mid-June. But true to its character, it did not pay heed and pursued its case in the Supreme Court. The case came before the Supreme Court on 11 July; as expected it was dismissed. It might then be of some interest to anticipate the government's next move.

### **Self-Financing Schools**

Even if the government pays the amount to the schools, along with arrears for the previous years, which is the least expected of it, the problem will not be resolved. The school managements have already

submitted that the rates recommended by the committee under all the three options are lower than the rates at which they are constrained to charge fees from the students. Even the rate of Rs 350 per month per student in Standard 8 to 10 under option 3 is much less than what the schools needed, in view of the rising pay scales of teachers and other expenses incurred by the schools. The government had indicated that a committee formed under the chairpersonship of the minister (school education) with the minister (tribal development), minister (social justice), and minister (minority affairs) as members would examine whether the scheme implemented by the tribal development department can be applied to the students of the above categories. In the meanwhile, it has drafted a bill for self-financing educational institutions, which could become an Act soon, obviating the problem itself.

This is the real solution the government has in mind for the problem of financing education. The government takes credit for the Right to Education Act, conveniently hiding the fact that not only was it already enshrined in the Constitution but also that the Constitution had specifically mandated it to introduce the free and compulsory education to all the children up to the age of 14 years within 10 years of its coming into effect. The government was reminded of this responsibility by the Supreme Court in the Unnikrishnan case in 1993. It still played mischief by restricting the liability to cover children only in the 6 to 14 years age group, thereby excluding 170 million children through the 86th Constitutional Amendment Act in 2002 and then enacted the so-called Right to Education Act in 2009. It projected this retrograde step negating the concept of neighbourhood schools (providing the same standard of education to all children in the locality) as per the spirit of the Constitution, explicated by the first Education (Kothari) Commission in 1966, as a revolution. Actually, it legitimised the multi-layered education system that had mushroomed with the neo-liberal ethos. Notwithstanding these serious lacunae, the government appeared to undertake the responsibility as it promised to complete the task within five years, i



e, by 2015. But, it began shirking its responsibility right from the first year itself under the age-old alibi of a resource constraint and under its cover opened the floodgates for private capital to inundate the entire terrain of education.

### **Challenging Delinquent Governance**

In accordance with its constitutional obligation, the government extends freeships to the students belonging to the backward communities in the government and aided schools. It cannot arbitrarily shy away from this responsibility in non-aided schools, as they have basically come up because of its inability to provide education to all children. The case under review does not concern the scheduled tribe students just because they are paid for by a separate department. As such, it has not been a question of principle but a question of mal-governance in not having basic policy coordination across its various arms, viz, education, social welfare and tribal departments. Instead of being ashamed of this fact, it has the temerity to dismiss the whole issue saying “it was a mistake” that it reimbursed fees in the past – a mistake that squandered crores of rupees of the exchequer over many years without being accounted for! The government also came up with the standard alibi of a budget constraint.

Notwithstanding the exposure that the state government actually failed to utilise more than Rs 2,000 crore collected through the education cess and provided by the central government in the last financial year, a resource constraint cannot be a reason for not meeting the obligation in respect of fundamental rights. But who will pose such questions to the government? The fact that people have to go to Court against the government upon the violation of their fundamental rights by the latter bespeaks volumes of the representative character of the governing institutions of the democratic republic of India. In the present case, a poor vegetable vendor had gone to court as he could not afford to pay fees for his son and a nephew.

The whole episode depicts the plight of the majority of the people; those who are said to live off a paltry income of Rs 20 a day are impelled by the government to seek justice against its delinquency through the courts. Instead of waking up to its irresponsibility, the government persists with it and plays more foul games with people who challenge it. The insensitivity of the government in the subject case, jeopardising the future of 13 lakh students belonging to the backward classes, towards whom the Constitution swears special responsibility, is indeed striking, but is in no way an isolated case. It has become a mark of its character. Can people then be blamed if they resort to unconstitutional means to get justice?

# The Farce Of Bhimshakti And Shivshakti

06 July, 2011

*“History repeats itself, the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.” -Karl Marx*

The famous quotation of Marx from The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, which comes in reference to the rule of Napoleon I and thereafter of his nephew Louis Napoleon (Napoleon III), actually runs as follows: “Hegel remarks somewhere that all great world-historic facts and personages appear, so to speak, twice. He forgot to add: the first time as tragedy, the second time as farce.” What if it repeated third time and fourth time or keeps repeating thereafter? Hegel or Marx did not envisage such a hilarious situation to comment on. In reference to the alliance between Ambedkarite Dalits and Shivsena, if Marx had known these two entities, he would have exclaimed, “the first time itself as farce and then repeated as bigger and bigger farce.”

## Pole Opposites

Indeed, if one is forced to think of an antonym of Ambedkarite Dalits, one would not get better answer than Shivsena. If Ambedkarite Dalit is conceived in organizational sense to adhere to Ambedkar’s ideology, Shivsena would come as its perfect opposite. Ambedkar was a quintessential democrat; Shivsena is prototypical fascist; Ambedkar was contemptuous of Hitler; Shivsena is known to be the admirer of Nazi dictator. Ambedkar stood for protection of minorities; Shivsena has consistently ridiculed it as pampering and actively harassed them to the extent of executing some of the worst communal riots. Ambedkar believed in constitutional regime and gave this country its Constitution; Shivsena often scoffed at it publicly. Ambedkar severally criticized Hinduism for its ideological structural inequities; Shivsena not only extols Hinduism but also

publicly admits its most aggressive version, Hindutva, which Ambedkar had foreseen as the sure disaster for India. Ambedkar without undermining the importance of religion advocated secularism; Shivsena openly misused religion to polarize people. Ambedkar ultimately stood for “liberty, equality and fraternity”, saying that it defined his social philosophy; Shivsena’s actions are ostensibly or declaredly premised on differential liberty, inequality and hatred. Look at from any angle and ideologically these two organizations may stand as the opposite poles.

This opposition was not even camouflaged. Shivsena in its own fascist rhetorical style did not spare even Babasaheb Ambedkar from its ridicule. It has never hid its hatred for Ambedkarite Dalits, ostensibly to consolidate all Dalit castes other than Mahars under its fold. It is only after the realization that this attitude might backfire by hurting Mahars in its ranks, it moderated it and presented itself as the admirer of Ambedkar in competition with any other electoral party. Of course, its history is fraught with instances of physical confrontation with Ambedkarite Dalits. In the Worli riots of 1974 it fought bitter street battle against the Dalit youth who had just organized themselves into Dalit Panthers, brutally martyring Bhagwat Jadhav. It spearheaded the opposition to renaming the Marathwada University after Babasaheb Ambedkar, for which Dalits had launched a massive agitation in the state. Many Dalits were raped and murdered; their properties destroyed by its cadre. It was the Shivsena which created the infamous Riddles controversy, actively opposing publication of Dr Ambedkar’s writings on Hinduism. It is only when the Ambedkarite Dalits got united over the issue, the Shivsena had backtracked its position and struck compromise. It has been always opposed to reservations, which are identified with Dalits and particularly Ambedkarite Dalits, as its originator and beneficiary. During the Sena-BJP rule in Maharashtra, 11 innocent Dalits were massacred in police firing in Ramabainagar. The government had doggedly protected the sub inspector, Manohar Kadam, who was

responsible for the murders. The saga of its misdeeds against the Ambedkarite Dalits can really go on.

### **Not a Tragedy**

Given the history of political opportunism of Dalit leaders, it was not a tragedy even for the first time. When Namdeo Dhasal, that fiery petrel of revolutionary idiom of yesteryears joined Shivsena's bandwagon in the mid 1990s, when he had already degenerated into political nothingness, it was nothing short of a farce. Nothing much happened to Dhasal, except for occasional denouncements by Dalits. He continued to be the leader of his outfit and the darling of the so called leftists of Mumbai and elsewhere. Thereafter, significant numbers of activists belonging to the Republican Party of India (RPI) had joined the Sena in Pune, Satara and Aurangabad. In fact, though faded in public memory, even before Dhasal's temerity, Gavai's RPI itself had experienced the electoral communion with Sena in the local elections way back in 1973. But when in 2003, Shiv Sena's Executive President Uddhav Thackeray mooted the idea of uniting Bhimshakti and Shivshakti on the eve of the state assembly elections, it created consternation in media. It was the late Arun Kamble, who along with Ramdas Athawale had propped up through the ashes of the original idea of Panthers, with what they called the Bharatiya Dalit Panthers, but was reduced to nobody in Dalit politics by then, had organized the function. At that time Ramdas Athawale had famously stated that the Shivsena giving up its hindutva ideology would be the precondition for such a unity. The idea did not fly off then beyond the posters and hoardings. Eventually, Bhimshakti was monopolized by Chandrakant Handore, which he tied to the Congress in exchange of a ministership.

That statement of Athawale was just a ploy to make the NCP-Congress realize the consequence of ignoring him. He was frustrated enough for not having been given ministerial berth at the centre. In the next parliamentary election, he was given the seat but was simultaneously seen that he was defeated. It was clear that for the

NCP he had outgrown his utility and could well be dispensed with. Athawale, who was picked up by Sharad Pawar from the streets and put into ministerial bungalow in 1990s to counter the threatening independence of Prakash Ambedkar. He let Athawale grow while decimating whatever that remained of the independent Dalit voice in Maharashtra. Having accomplished the latter goal, Athawale or for that matter any Dalit leader could no more bargain; they could stay only as his faithful hangers on. It is at this point the new farce began with Ramdas Athwale knocking at the gates of Matoshree (Bal Thackeray's fortress) with an alibi to wish him on his birth day. The other leaders of his RPI have apparently not been part of the deal with Shivsena or perhaps they have assessed better prospects in staying with NCP-Congress, aspiring to get Athwale's place. Perhaps, Thackeray himself did not want them, as he later said publicly. Jogendra Kawade, the big mouth who eats his words as people munch peanuts, and does all kinds of political somersaults, has been most vocal castigating the alliance in the name of departure from the Phule-Ambedkarite ideology. He accused him of joining hands with the Hindutva forces, forgetting his own communion with the very saffron band not in a very distant past. When the wounds of Ramabainagar massacre inflicted by the Sena-BJP combine were still oozing, Kawade had joined the Saffron Brigade and actively canvassed for BJP's Kirit Somaiya in 2009 elections in the same Ramabainagar. Indeed, the nakedness of all Dalit leaders gets exposed every time in the electoral hamam!

Why did Shivsena, who has never concealed its hatred for the Ambedkarite Dalits has taken the U-turn and extended hand of friendship to Athawale? The answer is not difficult to seek. As the feud between Uddhav and Raj Thackeray simmered, the Shivsena needed to supplement its eroding vote base with Ambedkarite Dalits, in the particular context of the Congress making Sushil Kumar Shinde, a Chambhar by caste, as the first ever Dalit chief minister. Shivsena's casteist calculation informed it that Mahars could be made to construe their pathetic state as their marginalization under the

Congress and be impelled to think aligning with it. Over the last few years the need of Shivsena and the disgruntlement of Athwale have only grown to reach a point of precipitation into this kind of unholy alliance. On the eve of elections to Mumbai Corporation to be held in 2012, with the growing electoral threat from MNS, Shivsena badly needed to fortify its position in Mumbai, which notwithstanding its strength elsewhere remains its crucial stronghold. It needs to hold on to it at any cost. There is nothing in its strategic option that it could try except for wooing Athawale. On the other hand, Athawale, having tested the meat of political power, does not have much option in the state politics to try out alliance with any other combine than the Shivsena-BJP, which could be imagined to win the next elections with incumbency factor, given the scam studded misgovernance of the Congress.

### **Questionable Consequence**

It is the moot question whether this alliance will really cause the desired Dalit swing in its favour. While there are noises being created against this alliance in the name of ideology, the fact remains that ideology has been the fluidest aspect of Dalit politics. Anything could be the ideology if it is shown to have approval of Babasaheb Ambedkar. Whether it was the early desertions of the RPI by the likes of Bhandares and Rupwates or the later co-optation pull by the Congress or the samarasata allurements of the Sangh Parivar, Ambedkar was duly invoked by the opportunists to shower his ideological blessings on their misdoings. They would argue that while calling the Congress as the burning house, Ambedkar himself had accepted its support to reach the Constituent Assembly and thereafter the ministerial berth in the first post-independence all party government headed by Jawaharlal Nehru. The combination of two vague things: Ambedkar's ideology and the interests of Dalits, has justified any and every act of opportunism of Dalit leaders. It has long lost its salience in voting for this or that party. The new generation of Dalits, which does not have this ideological hangover and do not carry past baggage of bitterness with Shivsena is

overridingly concerned with what brings them maximum material benefit. Their attitude therefore would be to put stakes on the winning horse.

No sooner than this alliance is announced, the Congress had already tried to weaken the state BJP by buying off Gopinath Munde, one of its senior leaders, as they did earlier with Chhagan Bhujbal and Narayan Rane for weakening the emerging threats of the Shivsena. It is a different matter that BJP has managed to thwart the threat for time being. They have got Bhalchandra Mungekar into their fold. Although, he may not be useful to influence Dalit masses in favour of the Congress, as a scholar activist, he could bring in wealth of information to strategize its move to manage Dalit votes. One of the obvious strategies would be to get the rest of the RPI leaders on its side and create noises that Athawale alone does not represent Bhimshakti. Such noises are already being made and may be amplified after the July meet of the Dalit leaders called by Kawade. Prakash Ambedkar, faces the same catch 22 situation as many times before and will prefer to stay aloof in the prison of conscience of his own making. There is no likelihood of viable third force getting cobbled up in a foreseeable future. Therefore the game would be played between the two alliances, the Congress/NCP and Sena/BJP. Those who stay independent may be accused of weakening the great Congress secularism and benefitting BJP. Of course, these developments bring in an opportunity for the BSP to make a forceful appeal to the Dalit masses. As their votes indicate, their appeal is expectedly rising. However, it is unlikely that they would really get it significantly better than the last time and the least, win any seat. In net terms the distribution of Dalit votes may not vary very significantly from the recent past for most elections except for the local bodies.

Because, at the local level, the salience of power is perceived sharply and therefore the young generation of Dalits might support the Sena alliance which is well entrenched in the Mumbai Corporation. In Mumbai and also surrounding corporations, since the battle is likely



to be three cornered between the BJP-Shivsena-RPI, MNS and the Congress-NCP and probably other RPIs, the slight swing could be very consequential. At the higher level bodies, there may not be much influence of this alliance. Although, much depends upon who creates right kinds of noise at the time of elections backed by the money and organizational power.

### **The Real Political Power**

The major issue is not what happens to the electoral outcome because of this cobbling but what can happen to the Dalits, in whose name such a farce gets enacted. The answer to the question is pretty clear: Whatever the electoral outcome, the fortune of Dalit leaders like Athawale would surely rise but the prospects of Dalit masses would be depleted. The gain to leaders accrues once the deal is capped. Interestingly, Athawale himself, though in his comic (or farcical?) style, referred to these political transactions as 'business' in his speeches several times and got applause in response from his fans! The business anyway shows up in his mounting networth as any politician's. After all, it is not a mean achievement for a resident of Siddharth Vihar to build a mansion in coveted Kalanagar, Bandra! Anyway, he is a politician and politicians are not supposed to be questioned about their financial wizardry that shames even the smartest share market player. It was little comic therefore that Raj Thackeray had briefly insinuated the stink.

As we have known, there is little difference at the level of policies of any political party. Therefore, in material terms there is absolutely no likelihood of the crises faced by the masses being lessened by any electoral outcome. Even in social sphere there may not be much difference as the characteristics of the forces behind these alliances in villages are the same. If Shivsena-BJP can gun down Dalits in Ramabainagar, Congress-NCP can give Dalits Khairlanji! With such electoral communion of leaders, Dalits get notionally embedded in the ruling alliances. Paradoxically, they lose their voice to question them. Any time such an occasion--an incident of caste atrocity, or

caste clash-- arises; their leaders would broker the rent for themselves and stay put the masses.

This process could be clearly observed by anyone during the last six decades and particularly, the last two of globalization making it blatant. However, since the Dalits have been intoxicated over a long time to see electoral politics as 'be all and end all' of their political life, it escaped from them. The entire system of electoral politics is so devised that it structurally benefits the brokers and intermediaries, euphemistically called leaders. These leaders simply keep creating mirage of political power and make the masses run after them. Political power conceived exclusively through electoral process would verily stay as an illusion for Dalits, given their numbers and relatively meager resource base. The charlatans pretending to be Dalit leaders make emotional appeal to the masses by invoking Ambedkar and fatten themselves on the tribute flowing from the ruling classes. The earliest the Dalits discard this mirage, the better it would be for them. Dalits do need political power. But that power is not going to come through the electoral process which essentially runs on money power. The elections have been a big trap that has blocked the political possibilities of Dalits. They need to rethink their strength in some other way; their real Bhimshakti. It lies in their organizational unity and prowess to fight for the real issues of living. It lies in broadening their unity transcending their caste barriers. If this happens, even the electoral politics with all its muscle would appear helplessly buckling before them. Political power is just the byproduct of the process of building this unity; unity through waging united mass struggles on the real issues. That will be the only effective way to end these farcical acrobatics by their political brokers.

### *Notes and referances*

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<sup>1</sup> [www.ae911truth.org](http://www.ae911truth.org)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.freedomfiles.org/war/pentagon.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <http://blog.mises.org/16519/ambedkar-the-forgotten-free-market-economist/>